

Blood, Bones and Spirit:

Aboriginal Christianity in Halls Creek, Western Australia

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DECLARATION

Except where otherwise indicated
this thesis is my own work.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "H. McDonald".

Heather McDonald

August 1998

To Calvin Luther Martin,

who writes of humanity's enthrallment to "the amnesiac
of neolithic historical consciousness" (1992:129)

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Note

In the interests of preserving the privacy of my informants I have chosen to change their names throughout this thesis.

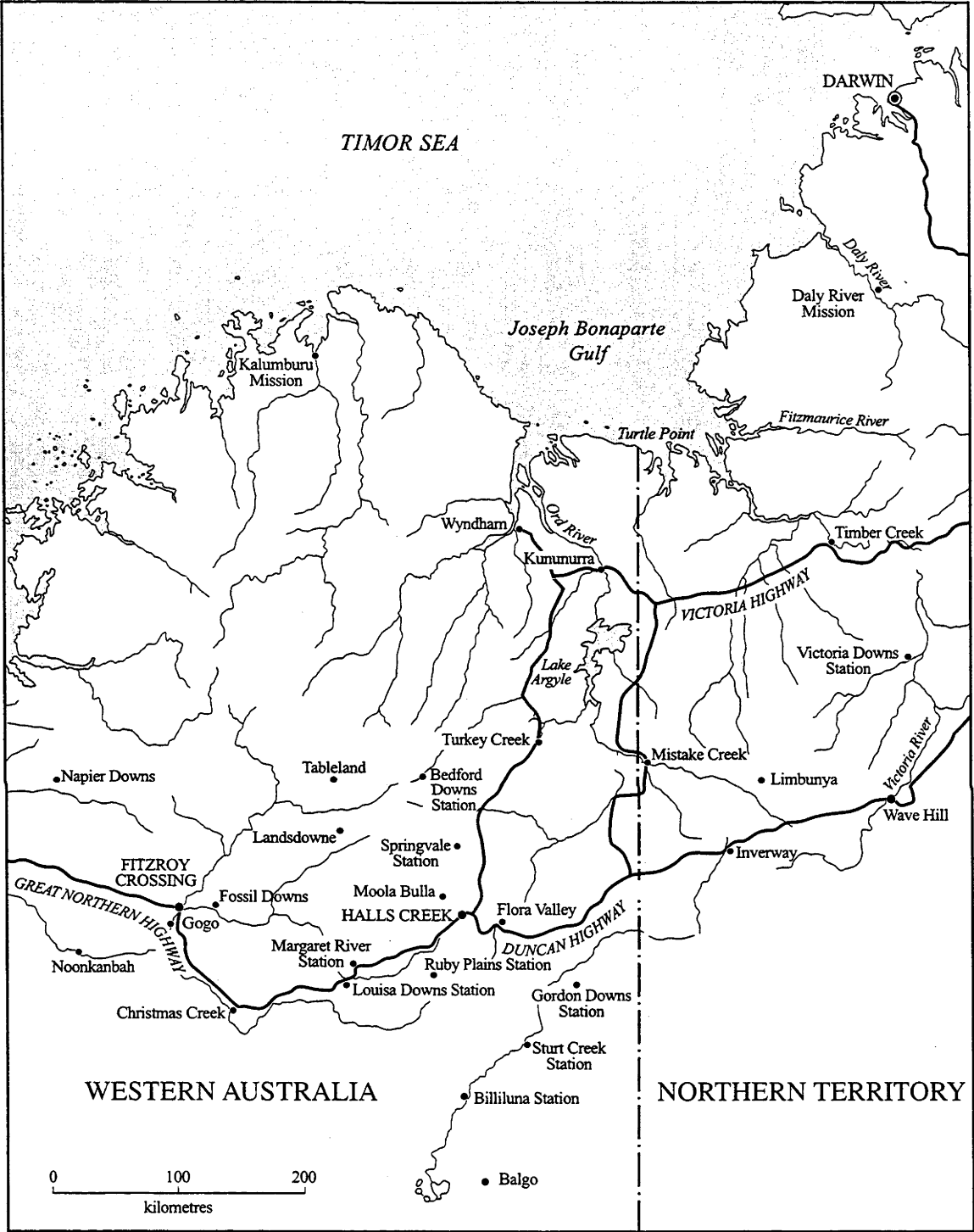
I am using the orthography decided on by the Kimberley Language Resource Centre in consultation with the Aboriginal speakers of the languages.

Abstract

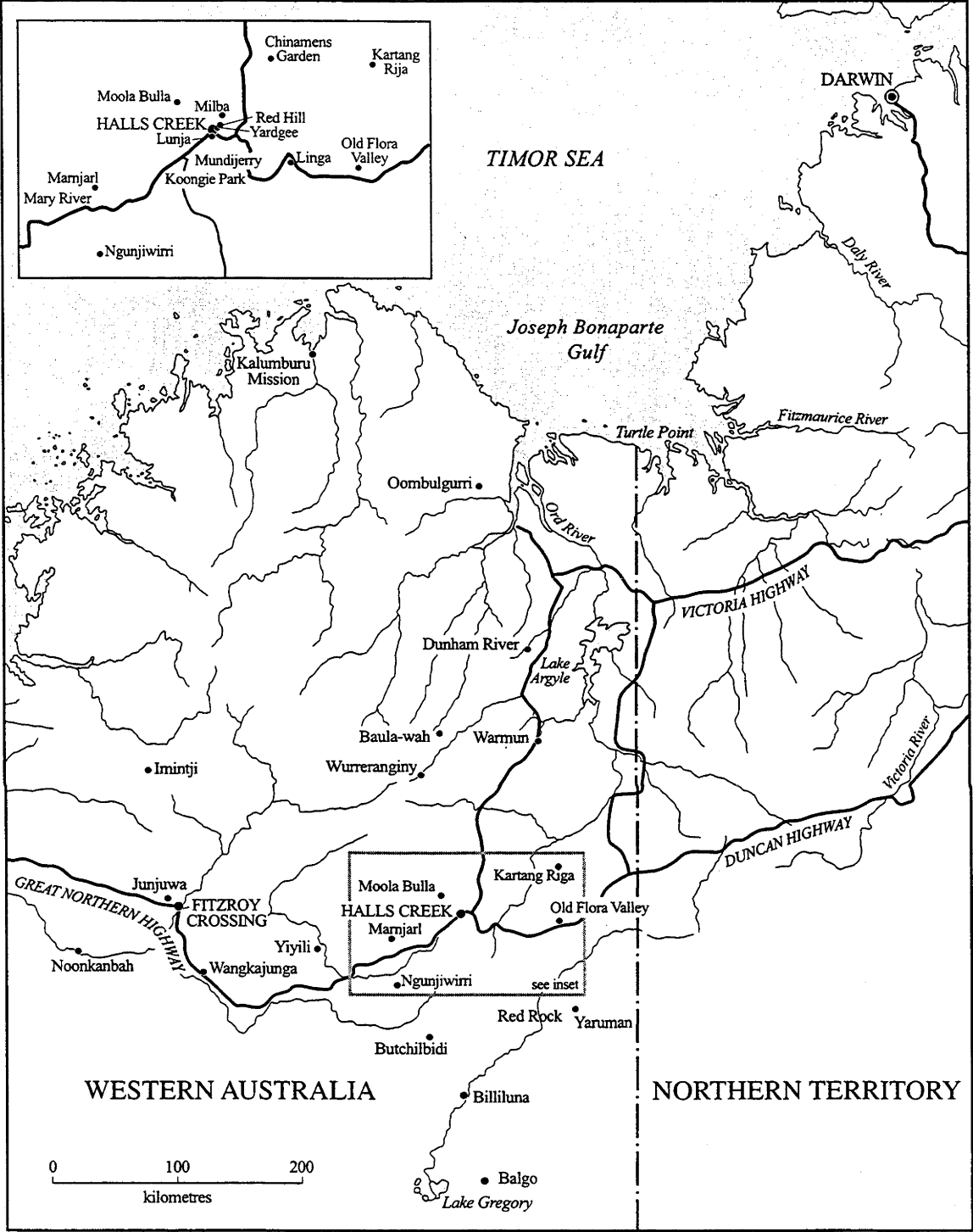
Both Aboriginal people and the peoples of the ancient Near East developed a conceptual system based on an organic model of the world. The organism is the dominant metaphor which binds the body, the body politic and the cosmos into a single cultural reality (see Merchant 1980:xviii). In agricultural/city-state societies the body politic and the cosmos together underwent a process of hierarchisation (and later universalisation), legitimised and naturalised by metaphorical transubstantiation, that is, the transfer of (hierarchically ordered) body parts from corporeal to incorporeal bodies. The Biblical writers "forgot" their pre-agrarian/city-state existence, beginning their creation stories with a fully hierarchised and self-sufficient God and an ontological separation between heaven and earth, and between creator and created. These changes in polity and cosmology led to subsequent changes in values, morality, ethics-justice and spirituality, producing finally a marked disjunction between the major world religions and indigenous religions despite continuity in ideas. Indigenous religions were read as shocking inversions of "true religion".

My thesis is a study of Christianising Aboriginal people in a small East Kimberley town. It is also a story of colonisation, dislocation and depletion; and an account of Aboriginal people's attempts to relocate themselves and replenish their colonised bodies. Aboriginal people have appropriated Biblical stories of land inheritance, expansion and loss in order to make sense of their own dispossession and to construct a history of colonisation in the Kimberley. These stories are connected together by Aboriginal political and cultural understandings of the world. Aboriginal Christians have appropriated Christ's broken body -

his blood, bones and spirit - in order to replenish and heal their colonised bodies and to strengthen their life-force which spreads out from the body into the world through social and moral actions.



Map 1 The East Kimberley Region Today – European Towns and Stations



Map 2 The East Kimberley Region Today – Aboriginal Communities

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INTRODUCTION

I am situating my thesis within an (anthropologised) history of religions perspective in order to subject Western Christianity (a historically-constituted order of truth) as well as Aboriginal Christianity to an anthropological gaze. It makes no sense to anthropologise Aboriginal Christianity but to leave Western Christianity unexamined as an historical or cosmological given. We need (in Rabinow's words):

to anthropologise the West: show how exotic its constitution of reality has been; emphasize those domains most taken for granted as universal (this includes epistemology and economics); make them seem as historically peculiar as possible; show how their claims to truth are linked to social practices and have hence become effective forces in the social world. (Rabinow 1986:241)

I cannot, if I am to follow Rabinow's advice, write a teleological philosophy of history of the sort that engaged post-Enlightenment theorists from Hegel to the Frankfurt School (including Weber's historical sociology). Such histories are immersed in a search for origins (a desire for presence) and in tracing the orderly progression of a universal rationality from its beginnings (in the West) to its final consummation in the "emancipation of humanity's true being" (Dean 1994:18, 45, 49).

Rather, I will need to take account of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical forms of historicising. Foucault's genealogies do not trace the emergence and development of human rationality and its

products, but seek to penetrate to the politico-economic domain (the domain of lived reality for Foucault) to uncover the “discursive practices” which produce regimes of truth. “Continuous histories” of the kind written by post-Enlightenment theorists conceal more than they uncover. Multiple rationalities, temporalities and trajectories are rendered singular, universal and purposeful-teleological. Foucault chooses to disrupt continuities with his archaeological/genealogical techniques. All concepts (and the discourses that nurture them) have histories.

Concepts and categories believed to be universal can be denaturalised, demystified and deconstructed. When the socially constructed nature of concepts, texts and orders of truth are understood and the socio-political conditions allowing such practices can be identified, they are denied any transcendental signification (Berkhofer 1995:4-11).

Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “dialogised texts” is useful here. Epics and other foundational texts are constructed dialogically, not monologically. Texts as sites of competition and struggle can also be read as events. Thus their social and political contexts are important for a genealogical analysis. Manuscripts also become multi-layered as the texts are subjected to readings, misreadings, translations and interpretations. Texts may be appropriated by politically disaffected groups and made to perform in factional contexts. Editors try to impose thematic coherence on texts, but in each age people’s political and social concerns are different.

Foucault, in his archaeological analysis, advises us to treat documents as monuments, that is, as discourses (dialogical, conflictual and multi-

layered) which have been shaped into unified systems of knowledge. As silent structures (that is, not revealing their power-knowledge relations and their discursive strategies), they are displays of power. They must be made to speak, that is, to reveal their historical forms of social, political, ethical and discursive practice (Dean 1994:215). In applying archaeological techniques, one does not uncover layers of emendations and accretions in order to reveal a pristine Ur-text. What one uncovers are the social and political struggles of people in previous historical periods expressed as truth claims (Frantzen 1990:176).

In Halls Creek, the Bible is a silent monument (in Foucault's sense), both for conservative Christian missionaries and for their Aboriginal proselytised, and as such, is a display of power. Both missionaries and Aboriginal Christians see written documents as having more authority (and being more reliable containers of truth) than oral traditions:

At the Tower of Babel ... a diversity of languages and cultures developed. Originally there may have been elements of truth in these cultures but through oral transmission of stories, this truth may have been lost. (Pastor John, UAM church)

Blackfella reckon *gardiya*¹ more true. He more educated. He got a Book. (LP)

We got nothing to believe on because they [Aboriginal stories] only been told to us and that's all. Nothing was written. This Christianity we can look back to the Bible and we got it there. Our Aboriginal stories, we haven't got a book to go on with it. (GJ)

¹ white person/people.

The Bible as a unified system of knowledge has also silenced local Aboriginal knowledges. An Assemblies of God (AOG) pastor in Halls Creek told Laurie Peters that his Dreaming stories about the stars were not true because they were not in the Bible. Conservative Christian missionaries who have assimilated all unknown spiritualities into the two-worlds dualism of the hellenised East, have recategorised Aboriginal spirits as the demons of Christianity. Their positive attributes (as helping spirits) have been silenced by the missionaries who recognise only their “evil” propensities (relating mainly to their involvement in traditional religious activities). Many Aboriginal Christians have, in consequence, “disremembered” the positive attributes of indigenous spirit forms, and this forgetting has been passed on to the younger generations.

However, despite this, there is still a pool of local knowledge available in Halls Creek which positively values traditional ways of being. Mixed descent people in the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) keep in touch with their more traditional relatives who live on the surrounding communities (on pastoral excisions and Aboriginal owned pastoral stations), many of which affiliate with the Catholic church. They seek advice from these more knowledgeable relatives, especially in times of crisis such as illness and death. Mixed descent people will go out bush (away from the European gaze) to perform smoking ceremonies for sick family members.

Halls Creek is a colonial town in East Kimberley with a population of approximately 1500 people (70% of whom are Aboriginal). The Aboriginal people are in the main Gija, Jaru and Guniyan speakers who have recently suffered a second displacement from their homes

and livelihoods on the pastoral stations which colonised the Kimberley a century earlier. Until the introduction of Award Wages for Aborigines in the late 1960s, which resulted in an exodus from the cattle stations to the towns, Halls Creek was a white town with a special section of the town set apart for mixed descent people, and two reserves allocated for a fluctuating population of full descent people. Today there are few Aboriginal people living on white-owned cattle stations, many in the towns, and some have been fortunate enough to acquire land through pastoral excisions and government purchase of pastoral stations.

Aboriginal people living in Halls Creek range from full-descent people who are traditionally oriented and speak only a very limited pidgin English when communicating with white people, to mixed-descent people who have had five years' secondary education in the south of the state and who hold well paid jobs in the town. Halls Creek people have a variety of residential styles. Most mixed-descent people and a growing number of full-descent people live in the town itself in European style state rental housing. Some full-descent people live on what was an Aboriginal reserve, now reclassified as an Aboriginal village owned and controlled by Homeswest (State Housing Commission). State rental accommodation in the town and village has proven unsatisfactory for many people, and in the late 1980s, a large number of full-descent people vacated these houses and moved on to some land outside the town boundaries acquired by the Shire and vested in the Aboriginal Lands Trust. This land is divided into five acre blocks so that people can live in their extended family groups. Aboriginal people have constructed their own housing on these blocks.

I spent two years in Halls Creek from 1989 to 1991. My fieldwork consisted of everyday interaction with Aboriginal people in town and on bush trips and participation in religious and secular gatherings. I attended both Christian and traditional religious ceremonies in Halls Creek, the surrounding outstations and nearby towns. I also attended meetings held by local and state government bodies and Aboriginal organisations, and community functions organised in and around the town. I conducted structured and unstructured interviews with Aborigines and European Australians, recording local histories, personal biographies and stories of all kinds (for example, Dreaming stories, Biblical stories and contact stories).

Missionisation followed colonisation and today about a quarter of the Halls Creek Aboriginal population identifies as Christian. There are three churches in Halls Creek: Catholic, United Aborigines Mission (UAM) and Assemblies of God (AOG). I initially attended AOG church services exclusively for seven months, later broadening my sights to include the UAM church, and in my final six months the Catholic church. My friends and informants were, in the main, AOG and UAM adherents who lived in the town of Halls Creek. Although I attended Catholic church services I was not able to spend long periods in everyday interaction with the Catholic mob, the majority of whom lived at Red Hill, an Aboriginal community outside Halls Creek. My material on Catholic Aboriginal Christianity is correspondingly limited.

My own religious background was a fundamentalist Christian one, and although I today identify as post-Christian, an interest in religions

has never left me. Thus, while my thesis is a study of Christianisation in Halls Creek, and deals with Aboriginal people's experiences of colonialism and post-colonialism in 19th and 20th century Australia, it also inquires into the Christianisation of European peoples and cultures and the hellenisation of Mediterranean cosmologies. These historical events have impacted on Aboriginal people in East Kimberley through the Christianisation process. My interest in indigenous peoples and cultures, and in anthropology as a discipline, stems from the 1970s when I worked with Aboriginal people in north Western Australia and the Northern Territory in the field of community health.

"New religious movements" became a popular topic of research in the Kimberley (and nearby areas of the Northern Territory) in the early colonial period. The proliferation of "cargo cults" in Melanesia in the wake of European colonisation stimulated researchers to look for similar expressions in Aboriginal Australia. The Mulunga cult of northwest Queensland which spread into South Australia (from the 1880s to the 1930s), was one of the first anti-colonial cults to be reported in Australia. It excited the research interest of Roth (1897), Siebert (1910), Spencer (1928) and Elkin (1930). Performers in this cult re-enacted the bloody confrontation between whites and blacks until the "Grandmother", a powerful ancestral being, emerged from the sea to swallow all the whites (see Swain 1993:224-233).

The earliest colonial studies of "new religious movements" reflect European colonial beliefs and values. In this period, it was taken for granted by missionaries and social scientists alike that colonised peoples would eventually become like them. Theorists and policy

makers saw assimilation as the appropriate goal for indigenous peoples within a colonial state. Missionaries and religious scholars were the first to enter the discourse on colonial religious movements. They used descriptive terms available to them from their own religious traditions - "messianism", "millenarianism" and "prophetism" - in order to render the strange cults familiar. Their studies were mainly ahistorical and apolitical typology constructions (see Oosthuizen 1967; Sundkler 1948, 1976; Turner 1976). The indigenous movements were viewed as *sui generis* religious phenomena divorced from their traditional socio-political contexts, and unrelated to the overarching colonial administration.

Anthropologists entered the discourse in the 1930s and 1940s, and using the terminology of the religious theorists, began to construct their theories of social change. In this colonial period, anthropologists saw new religious movements as prime examples of acculturation to the European way of life. These strange hybrid cults, however anti-colonialist in theme, were believed to be transitional stages along the road to full acculturation or assimilation (see Barber 1941; Barnett *et al* 1954; Dohrenwend and Smith 1962; Linton 1940,1943; Spicer 1962; Vogt 1957). Wallace (1956) and Aberle (1962) contributed psychological theories to the debate on new religious movements and acculturation. In the 1970s and 1980s when acculturation theories became unpopular, some anthropologists attempted to situate "millenarian" and "messianic" cults within a Marxist mode of production framework (see van Fossen 1988).

In northern Australia, new politico-religious movements have been studied by Lommel, Koepping, Kolig, Petri and Petri-Odermann, Rose,

Swain and others. Because the subject has been well analysed already and because I see colonial discourse about "millenarian" and "messianic" cults as relatively peripheral to my study of Aboriginal Christianity in Halls Creek, I will just give a short overview here.

The Gunabibi travelling cult, which originated perhaps in the Victoria River or Roper River regions, spread into other parts of northern Australia via the indigenous exchange lines which carried not only goods and technologies but also religious ceremonies and ideas (McCarthy 1939:104; Micha 1970). The exchange lines which formed a vast network of exchange throughout Australia, followed the ancestral dreaming tracks and were declared fighting-free zones (Horne and Aiston 1924:129, cited in Micha 1970:305) which allowed them to become sites of innovation and change. Anthropologists from the 1930s to the 1960s recorded the spread of the Gunabibi cult into Arnhem Land, East Kimberley and Central Australia (see Berndt 1951a:233; Meggitt 1955:401; Petri 1954:265).

In Central Australia and East Kimberley, the cult developed into the Gunabibi-Gadjeri complex with masculinist forms and ideologies (see Meggitt 1966:84-86) and became associated with the wandering Dingari-Kurangara song-cycle.² This song-cycle which brought the desert

² *Dingari* refers to the Dreaming in a number of Western Desert languages and also to a group of spirit beings who are believed to have traversed the whole Western Desert, particularly in the Canning Stock Route region. They are known from Laverton in the south to Djamindjung, beyond the Victoria River (Berndt and Berndt 1968:224). In West Kimberley *Dingari* is both the Dreaming and a distant country in the east from where the Kurangara cult has come (Petri 1956:154-156, cited in Meggitt 1966:32-33).

Kuran [*kurun*] means "life-force" in Pitjantjatjara (Goddard 1992:47), and the suffix, *-ngara* designates "belonging to" in a number of Kimberley languages (Petri 1954:257, cited in Eliade 1968:250). The desert origins of the term and song cycle have been contested by more recent researchers (see Swain 1993:239-242). But whatever its origins, *kurangara* came to be seen in the Kimberley as a "deadly power" (see Petri 1950:43, cited in Eliade 1968:250) because it came from a strange and distant country.

janba, spirits of the dead,³ into regional prominence, began in the 1930s to engage with new forms of power in order to counter the spectre of colonisation. These religious innovations were studied in the Kimberley from 1938 to 1966 by Lommel (1950) and Petri and Petri-Odermann (1970).

The power in which the Kuranggara cultists trafficked was the power of the greatly feared introduced diseases, leprosy and syphilis. The ancestral boss of the cult who had access to European forms of knowledge and power, lived in a white man's house growing leprosy and syphilis from poisonous weeds in his backyard. This power was sung into ceremonial boards which were distributed throughout northwest Australia by motor vehicle, steamer and aeroplane (Lommel 1950:23).

In 1963 the Dingari-Kuranggara traditions merged with the new Woagaia-Jinimin movement developing out of the Gadjeri-Woagaia cult complex of Central Australia. Jinimin, the precocious son of an old venerable ancestral being (see Stanner 1958:55), revealed himself to Aboriginal people in Central Australia as Jesus Christ, the protector and preserver of the Old Law. Jinimin-Jesus proclaimed that the land had from the beginning belonged to the Aborigines, and that in the new order, it will belong equally to Aborigines and European Australians (Petri and Petri-Odermann 1970:258,259). Aboriginal people would become white when Holy Water fell from the sky to change the colour of their skin (Petri and Petri-Odermann 1988:393).

³ See Meggitt's (1955) rather Christianised description of *janba* spirits.

By 1966, the Woagaia-Jinimin cult, proclaimed as "God's Law", had spread to the west. There, according to Petri and Petri-Odermann (1970:254), Walmajarri people who had been influenced by both UAM (at Fitzroy Crossing) and Catholic (at La Grange) teachings, were trying to find a rapprochement between Old Testament doctrines and Aboriginal Law. They had also been migrating in a northwesterly direction from the desert areas 200 miles southeast of Fitzroy Crossing since the turn of the 20th century.

Under Walmajarri direction, the Dingari-Kurangara ancestral groups were "returning" from the desert (like the Children of Israel) to their "true" country in the well-watered northwest. The Dreamtime groups were marching over the underground routes (used for traversing the country of strangers), using camels to carry their *daragu*. Their leader and protector on this journey was Jinimin-Jesus. The Dreamtime ancestors and their human descendents, the Walmajarri, must continue their migration westwards until they reached the "centre of the world" (Petri and Petri-Odermann 1970:251-272). The Woagaia-Jinimin travelling cult was used to legitimise the northwesterly migration of Walmajarri people and their establishing of power claims in new areas. It was also an attempt by Aborigines who had been marginalised by European colonisation to find again the centre of the world.

One leader of the Jinimin movement was Lulidj, a Walmajarri man living at Fitzroy Crossing, who identified himself with the Biblical Noah, and was said to be looking after a gold-laden Ark sent to him from heaven by Jinimin. According to the Aboriginal "Bible" kept at Myroodah Station, this Ark is both a refuge from the flood that will

destroy all Europeans and the basis of a new and powerful Aboriginal world (Petri and Petri-Odermann 1970:265).

Kolig, who continued research into the Noah's Ark narratives in the 1970s, found them to have originated south of the Fitzroy River and to have travelled via the exchange routes to La Grange, Broome, Derby and Balgo Mission. The original dreamer and "finder" of the Ark was a man from Myroodah Station who interpreted his find as evidence of God's wrath against white people (who perished in the flood) and his beneficence towards Aborigines (who were saved). Because, in some versions of the story, all white people drowned, Australia belonged to the Aborigines until the time of Captain Cook (Kolig 1980a:123-125).

Aboriginal colonial narratives featuring Captain Cook as the major agent of colonisation, have been studied in the Kimberley and Northern Territory by Kolig (1980b), Rose (1984) and Mackinolty (1988). Captain Cook, like Aboriginal Dreaming beings, was a Law-maker but he refused to recognise Aboriginal Law. Aboriginal prior occupancy and ownership of the country was obvious:

You [Captain Cook] been look around, see the land now. People been here, really got their own culture. All around Australia... we the one on the land. Sitting on the land, Aboriginal people. You got nothing, all you government... we got all the culture. That Dreaming place, important one. (Hobbles Danaiyairi, cited in Rose 1984:34)

Captain Cook carried out his colonising programme by imposing his own immoral law over the top of Aboriginal Law. Aboriginal country and its products and human labour were appropriated by Europeans to enhance their own political and economic well-being, that is, to "make themselves strong", at Aboriginal people's expense (Rose 1984:35). The

Captain Cook narrative is a discourse of resistance because it locates responsibility for colonisation not in the spirit realm but in European law and practice, and it finds this law to be immoral (Rose 1988:371).⁴

If Captain Cook has been a negative presence in most Aboriginal colonial narratives, Ned Kelly has been given a different focus. In Yarralin stories, Ned Kelly and his band of angels came down from the sky. They were friends of Aboriginal people, and travelled around the Northern Territory and Kimberley shooting police. Kelly's life story has been conflated with Biblical stories about God, Noah and Jesus. Kelly created dry land after the flood. He fed many Aborigines with one billy of tea and a small damper. In one version of the story, he was killed by Captain Cook. He was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead, ascending to the sky to the accompaniment of a great noise and the shaking of the earth (Rose 1988:369; 1994:182-184).

Beckett (1993) writes of a man from northwest New South Wales who in 1958 attempted to construct a history of the world by linking "the old people's stories" and his own life history with larger Biblical themes. Beckett sees this attempt to articulate colonisation with Dreaming and Bible narratives as unusual and attributes it to Newton's marginalised status in a rural colonial town. Newton was a mixed-descent man who had been "adopted" as a child by a white station owner, and who in old age lived in self-exile from his Aboriginal kinspeople.

⁴ Wainburranga's story of Captain Cook (in Mackinolty and Wainburranga 1988) is rather different. See Chapter 4.

Beckett states that traditionally-oriented Aborigines regard whitefella law and the Dreaming as incommensurable knowledges, and do not attempt to make a rapprochement between them. He cites Stanner's quotation from an old Murinbata man in the 1950s that "white man got no dreaming, him go 'nother way" (1956:51). But he does not mention a more recent statement in the 1980s by Paddy Roe of South Kimberley: "that priest and that church, that's dreaming too... I know Jesus was a human being, then he gone but his father [God]... he's a *bugarrigarra* [Dreaming]" (cited in Benterrak *et al* 1984:169,170).

While, for the earliest generation of proselytised Aborigines, God was a "new chum" who did not come from the Dreaming or leave his tracks and bodily substances in the country,⁵ for mission-educated Aborigines, the Christian God has been around for a long time. People who have received some European and missionary education have found that Jesus behaved in much the same way as Aboriginal ancestors. He came down from the sky, journeyed around the land of Palestine, performed miracles and healings, was chased by priests or clever men who wished to kill him, and in the end was killed by enemy soldiers, and went back up into the sky.

For some people, God and Jesus walked around Aboriginal country in the Dreamtime. An old Burarra man from Maningrida speaks of God and "those two women" walking together along the coastal Dreaming tracks during their creative travels (Armstrong 1967:69). In Bandjalang country twelve trees stand in a row, and the story tells that Jesus passed this way and these trees are his apostles. A butterfly ceremony

⁵ Newly proselytised Aborigines in northwestern Australia confided to Capell (1950:177) that "this one God, he new chum, he no more bin leave him corroboree".

which travelled from South Australia to Queensland reveals that the butterfly was Jesus in his pre-European ancestral form. He was killed by the Workaia and Wa:nji people and then his spirit went to the white people (Kelly 1944:151).

In the 1950s Bandjalang people developed some elaborate foundation stories from Biblical and Dreaming sources. Ngathunggali-God landed on the north coast of New South Wales in a bark canoe. His people, the Bandjalang, are the descendents of Jacob who set out from the Holy Land in a sailing ship which was wrecked off the coast of New South Wales. The crew safely reached shore, built a bark canoe and continued on their journey. Twelve tribes of Aborigines developed from these "founding fathers". The Bandjalang identified themselves as one of the "lost" tribes of Israel (Calley 1955 Pt 3: 6,7).

The Old Law was a special revelation of Ngathunggali-God to the Bandjalang. God spoke to Aboriginal people through the clever men. Balugan-Christ was killed by enemies (white people) at Kempsey, and is buried on the Arakoon race-course from whence he will return to the Bandjalang. The white people, prosperous and powerful, crucified Christ and are rejected by God. The Bandjalang, humble and poor like Christ, are beloved of God. The Aborigines will go to heaven and the whites to hell (Calley 1964:52,53).

East Kimberley people talk about the (European-Australian) Dreaming government, and about *ngarangkani* (Dreaming) people in the Bible. When discussing Dreaming stories, they will say, "That's Dream. Early days. When Jesus Christ must have been walking too" (BN). But for Halls Creek people, the ground on which Jesus walked was not the

Kimberley: "it's the Holy Land where Jesus was walking on the ground" (EN). When listening to Biblical stories of human ambition and achievement, love, hate and loss, East Kimberley people will say, "That's not far from *ngarangkani* word. Aboriginal people got the same story, but they had it other way round".

It says in the Bible that when God used to speak to Abraham and Moses, he used to speak by dream... he used to come in dream and tell them what to do. They had to take notice. Well that's the same as *ngarangkani*. This spirit come and he paralyse people when they sleep. He tell them all these stories, and he teach them how to sing. *Ngarangkani* not far from Bible story. (EN)⁶

"Maddy Jarra's world history" (Chapter 4 in this thesis) could be seen as a piece of colonial theologising. In this narrative, apart from the Beginning time when there was no trouble in the world, God has only a background role. Satan, an agent of colonisation, takes the central position, and he is not yet ready to relinquish this. Today, in East Kimberley, God and the Devil are still locked together in a relationship of jealousy and rivalry. This contrasts with regions in Arnhem Land and North Queensland where students and graduates of the Nungalinga and Wontulp-Bi-Buya Colleges are attempting to develop post-colonial theologies. In these theologies the role of the Devil is downplayed while God (and Aboriginal spirit beings) take prominent positions (see Chapter 8).

Like Aboriginal people, I also claim that there is a continuity in ideas from hunter-gatherer religions to world religions. I do not see this as a

⁶ Yolngu people also say, the missionary here has good news and a good way. We have two minds to think: we worship two Gods. The European Bible is one way: but these *rangga* here on the Memorial are our Bible, and this is not far from the European Bible. (cited in Berndt 1962:77)

continuity of plot, especially not the post-Enlightenment plot of spiritual, intellectual or social progress. Rather, I see it as a continuity of fragments, that is, the fragments and detritus (but also the source of new life) of earthly and bodily existence - of blood, bones and spirit.

In Chapter 1, I look at people's changing relationships to the land. Aboriginal spirituality is a land-based spirituality. The early Hebrew (agricultural/city-state) religion was also land-based. But as a result of hierarchising politico-cosmic structures, warring between city-states, territorial expansion and the obliteration of boundaries, the location of extra-human potency became problematic. In Chapter 2, I examine the hierarchising (and universalising) Mediterranean cosmologies, the hellenising of Mediterranean religions, and the Christianising of medieval Europe and Aboriginal Australia. Chapter 3 is a study of 19th century colonisation and missionisation of the non-European world, and a history of the Christian churches in East Kimberley with their colonial theologies and missiologies.

"Maddy Jarra's world history" in Chapter 4 portrays Halls Creek people's appropriation of Biblical stories in their attempts to make sense of (and construct a history of) colonisation in East Kimberley. Chapter 5 examines Aboriginal people's understandings and experiences of being Christian, and whether Western (or indigenising) Christianity can meet the needs of Aboriginal people living in white, colonial towns such as Halls Creek. Aboriginal people's appropriation of Christ's blood, bones and spirit can be understood in terms of organic and holistic models of the world and indigenous flow theories of life. Church activities and relationships are discussed in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, a history of religions approach aids anthropological

understanding of present day conflicts in the churches between missionaries and their Aboriginal adherents.

Chapter 8 looks at the changing relationships (and balance of power) between world religions and indigenous religions in Western Christian and post-Christian discourses, and tentatively examines the appropriation of an agricultural Mother-Earth philosophy by people from both indigenous and world religious backgrounds.

CHAPTER 1

LAND/COSMOS

Embodied implacement is a fundamental human experience. Bodies, by their shapes, positionality and actions, constitute places (Casey 1993:48,49). But our (Western) history, a history of hierarchising social orders, warring and empire-building, is a history of increasing human dislocation and disembodiment. Bodies and meanings (including religions) have been dislocated from human-shaped places into a universal realm of increasingly infinite space.

Aboriginal views of land

Aboriginal people, like all peoples who live in close relationship with the living environment, developed an organic model of the universe in which everything was interconnected. As Michael Jackson states in his discussion of Warlpiri relationships to the land:

Warlpiri recognise a metaphorical fusion between person and place ... metaphors mediate correspondences between parts of the world of experience that are not ordinarily seen as belonging together, such as the human body, the body of a community, and the body of land. (Jackson 1995:157)

Land, bodies and the cosmos generally, were seen to be formed of one continuous substance and were connected physically, socially and morally. The living cosmos was also imbued with an energising power which circulated through all life-forms. Bodies were permeable to each other and to the living environment. Everything was interconnected and interdependent.

One might be tempted here to speak of an ontology of finitude, a manner of being in the world that is self-sustaining (or inter-sustaining) and not dependent on transcendent or outside forces (see Dean 1975:90-97). However, according to Caputo (1993:264), "the language of limit and finitude... belongs to the most traditional metaphysics of infinity": it implies that it needs to be completed or fulfilled by "a philosophy of the unlimited".¹ One could perhaps better speak of an ontology of consubstantiality.²

The land was given shape and substance during the transformative journeys of ancestral beings. Ancestral activities and bodily processes were transformed into land forms permeated with the energy and power of those activities. Bodily secretions such as blood, urine, semen and faeces metamorphosed into rocks, ochres and water sources. These ancestral substances and energies remain in the land and can be accessed by humans.

Munn (1973:166-173) discusses the gendering of land in her studies of Warlpiri iconography. She refers in particular to men's ancestral designs which utilise the symbols of concentric circles linked by straight lines. The circle, a symbol of female fecundity and nurturance, is a repository of many meanings: totemic waterhole, camping place,

¹ For Boyarin (1994:141), "the very notion of fulfilment is a hellenistically inspired Pauline innovation in theology". Old Jesuit seminaries taught two courses: the metaphysics of finite being (creatures), and the metaphysics of infinite being (God) (Caputo 1993:264).

² Strehlow speaks (using at times a rather Christianised language) of humans being bound to the supernatural beings whom they honoured in ritual in a form of reincarnation relationship, as if they were of the same substance as them... many increase ceremonies centered around the ground paintings [which were] saturated with blood from the veins of men believed to be of the same substance as the supernatural beings celebrated in the increase rites. (Strehlow 1963:249,250)

fertile womb, belly, breasts, reproductive substances and embryonic life-forms. The circle-line configuration may represent the diurnal and seasonal movements of hunter-gatherers and the sexual regeneration of organic life.

Strehlow (1970:513) mentions a "serpent lake" in Arrernte territory, a pool of spring water fed by "the fountains of inexhaustible fluids" which pour from the wombs of the Alkngarintja women "during menstruation and on occasions of sexual excitement". In the Djarrakpi paintings of northeast Arnhem Land, the menstrual blood of an ancestral woman flows into the lake at Djarrakpi to become a source of conception spirits. An emu foot/digging stick/penis poking about in the lake symbolises sexual intercourse and procreation (Morphy 1991:280-285).

The landscape is not a static representation of the ancestral past. The countryside is continually being transformed by the economic, social and cultural practices of humans, both countrymen and strangers. As hunters and gatherers move across the land, their presence and behaviour can have positive or negative effects on the health and productivity of the country. People's speech, actions and bodily secretions can make the country "sweet" and generous or cause it to "dry up" and/or withhold its products (Povinelli 1993:31-33). Through human labour practices and ritual action, the land becomes a repository not only of the ancestral past, but of contemporary socio-political and cultural meanings.

Historical associations to land traditionally owned by other groups can be converted into "traditional" associations through human labour

practices and ritual action (Povinelli 1993:133-136,289). Dreaming narratives can be creatively reinterpreted to explain or legitimise current social and political relationships to land. Tonkinson (1991:135-137) gives an example of post-colonial attachment to land acquiring Dreaming status through the appropriation and expansion of another group's ceremonial cycles (the Ngaawayil rainmaking ceremonies) and the discovery of sacred objects (rainmaking stones) related to these cycles in the home territory:

The Mardu men have reinterpreted some of the more obscure Ngaawayil songs, i.e. they have connected them to Mardu sites and Mardu Dreaming beings... [They] have amplified the Ngaawayil myth to incorporate the appearance of the rainmakers in Mardu country... This appropriation of knowledge strengthens the claims of these Mardu to proprietorial rights. (Tonkinson 1991:136-137)

The Aboriginal Body

The Aboriginal body as discussed in this thesis is not the classical body of aristocratic Greek literature, the etherealised body of Pauline (New Testament) writings or the individualised and contained body of Western modernity. The Aboriginal body is an organic body which is consubstantial with, and permeable to, the living environment. It is composed of flesh and blood, bones and spirit, and is subject to the organic processes of fecundity, growth and decay. It is a body which sweats, urinates, defaecates and copulates, that is, its organic and secretory nature has not been banished from public (including religious) discourse.

Bakhtin, in his study of Rabelais (1968), discusses the medieval European body in contrast to the Renaissance and later European

bodies. The medieval body, an organic body existing in vital relationship to the living world, is portrayed by Bakhtin as "the grotesque body", that is, grotesque from the point of view of refined, civilised society, and subject to carnivalesque play and satire.

The grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process and change. (Russo 1995:62)

The grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit... The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. (Bakhtin 1968:26)

The grotesque body emphasizes in particular "the lower bodily stratum", the zone of excrement and procreation, of decomposition and rebirth. The female body is the grotesque body par excellence, ceaselessly generating and dissipating bodily substances and creating new life from its cavernous depths (Young 1997:179). Male bodies which behave in such a manner are often feminised, in contrast to the sublime male body of classical literature and New Testament writings which is prone to vanishing into a transcendent realm of bodiless meaning (see Case 1995:195). In medieval literature, the life-blood of the feminised Christ overflows effusively from his lactating breasts to nourish humanity into new life (see Chapter 5).

The medieval body was a fluid body:

This flowing and indistinctly structured body [contained] nothing solid... no clearly demarcated organs. What it did [contain] were metamorphosis, movement, urges, and stagnating resistance... the fluids in the body could change into blood, milk, excrement, sweat, humidity, scorbutic and impure matter, and appear in so many places... the somatic

order of the differences between above and below, inside and outside seems [to us] completely mixed up.... Women suffered from an inner flux [matter flowing in or from the body]... they were fearful that this flux inside them could be "stuck in", be driven back, become stuck. (Duden 1991:124,130)

Bodily fluids are important in Aboriginal ontology and cosmology. Urine, sweat, faeces, blood and semen flow through (or stagnate in) bodies and the land. There is also an exchange of substances between bodies and the land. Aboriginal people wash the sweat from their bodies into waterholes. And when they put their hands into the earth,

all that power from the Ancestors and their *kumpu* [urine, body fluid] comes right up into your hand. (Ivy Robertson Napangarti, cited in Watson 1999:1).

Sheldrake talks about "flow theories of life" which are common to peoples of small-scale autochthonous societies. The flow of life, which is like the flow of breath, or like fire, "is not only within living organisms, but all around them. The breath of life is also the air, the wind, the spirit" (Sheldrake 1990:77). Sheldrake quotes from Hildebrand's (1988) discussion of the Ufaina (Amazonian) cosmology:

When a being is born, the vital force enters it and the group to which the being belongs. The group is seen as borrowing the energy from the total stock of energy. When a being dies it releases this energy, and returns it to the stock. It is once again recycled. When a living thing consumes another ... the consumer acquires the energy of the consumed and it accumulates in its own body. (Hildebrand 1988, cited in Sheldrake 1990:77)

Taylor takes up this theme in his discussion of Rwandan social life. He talks of the Rwandan "flow/blockage dialectic" which permeates all discourse and practice, and which has developed peculiar complexities

to accommodate a hierarchising politico-cosmic order. The king's body has become a conduit between sky and earth, and all celestial beneficence must pass through his alimentary canal. For this reason the king's body is subject to much attention, including the daily ingestion of powerful purgatives (Taylor 1992:32-34).

Maddock (1969), in the Australian literature, discusses the flow and exchange of bodily substances between groups of people through "Mara necrophagy". He places this form of mortuary cannibalism within a larger system of reciprocal exchange involving alliance-forming groups in the Roper River/Bamyili area:

A common theme in Aboriginal mythology is passage into, out of, or through the body of another. The theme is expressed ritually in the Gunabibi cult on the Beswick Reserve and, I believe, at Roper River Mission... Necrophagy enables the Aborigines to achieve a passage through the body that, at other stages of ritual, they are able only to symbolise [through swallowing and regurgitating myths]. (Maddock 1969:103)

Morphy (1991) likewise sees funerary ceremonies and initiation ceremonies in northeast Arnhem Land as ways of facilitating the flow of ancestral life-forces between the living and the dead:

One of the main objectives [of burial ceremonies] was to return the spirit of the dead person to [the] source of spiritual power... the Djungguwan ceremony reverses the process, transferring spiritual powers from the wangarr ancestors to living members of the clan. (Morphy 1991:132)

I was led to think about flow theories of life when Aboriginal women in Halls Creek began discussing health and illness. A healthy body is one which is clean and cool, allowing for an optimum flow of life energies. Fresh air blows in and out of the airways, infusing the body

and enlivening one's faculties (of hearing etc) so that one can listen and understand.³ One's life-force (*birlirr*) does not stay in one place but moves around the body via the bloodstream to where it is needed most (that is, to where activity is taking place). Its resting place is the *munda* (stomach/diaphragm area).

Obstruction to the healthy flow of life energies within the body can be caused by thickening the blood or by insertion of foreign objects into the body. Some objects that remain in the land from the Dreamtime, if interfered with, can cause death in humans by blocking their air flow:

That there shell now, *Ibmay*, you can't go near him. He might shut off wind you know, kill us... he shut you in, sort of close up, just like a mussel shell. (cited in Strang 1997:253)

"Cooking people inside" (a method of sorcery) will congeal the blood and turn it black. Sinful activities (for example, drinking and smoking) can produce similar effects in the body (see Chapter 5).⁴

³ After reading this part of my thesis, Christine Watson alerted me to an article written (in French) by Father Peile of Balgo Mission, and translated by herself:

When the wind, at the right temperature - not too hot and not too cold - enters into the body, mainly through the nose, but also the mouth and the ears, it becomes breath... This breath allows the organs and the blood vessels to palpitate or "breathe"... The wind keeps the body and the spirit cold and dry. It nourishes and dynamises the breath and the spirit in the person, thus maintaining the body in good health. (Peile 1985:77,78)

Hamilton (1981:54) talks about winds in northcentral Arnhem Land which cause sickness in people, for example, a wind which blows from the "diarrhoea dreaming place" bringing "gutsache" to adults and children. Berndt (1982:123) discusses a Gunwinggu Dreaming story in which a hot wind seeks people out, "coming to burn them like hot ashes going into their bodies when they breathed, like smoke going every way from mosquito fires".

⁴ One of Reid's informants at Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land expressed a Yolngu understanding of illness in similar terms:

Because of too much dancing or fighting with a stick, the blood doesn't come out but goes down into the *dholng* [urogenital region] and goes hard there and makes it bad by blocking or something. (Reid 1983:132)

The *mabarn* man's⁵ body is a healthy body par excellence. Its channels are kept open by ritual and dietary practices so that its life-renewing powers can flow unimpeded.⁶ Traditional singers also have clean bodies. Singing produces sound waves carrying ancestral words which vibrate through the body, cleansing and strengthening it.

Jackson discusses the relationship of bodies to land with reference to the Warlpiri people of Central Australia. Warlpiri people make a specific connection between belly and sacred waterhole (as places that generate and sustain life), through polysemous language. The metaphorical fusion of person and country occurs "in terms of internal, visceral physiology and not just in terms of external anatomy" (Jackson 1995:162), although the Warlpiri, no doubt, would not make a Platonic inside/outside distinction here. In East Kimberley, land and bodies share the same (kin-based) morality and the same emotions:

If you feel sorry, the country will feel sorry too. If you thinking about someone [in a revengeful way], the country will think about him too. The country will kill him. Country can get wild too. (LP)

Emotions and psychic energies are not individually owned and self-contained, but cross between people, and between people and the

⁵ Traditional healer, medicine man, clever man.

⁶ The East Kimberley *mabarn* man must avoid milky products which will cloud his vision. Reid's northeast Arnhem Land informants utilised hot/cold and wet/dry contrasts in their explanations of health and illness, sorcery and healing:

The healer must, for instance, avoid hot drinks. These may weaken his powers. He works only in the cool of the day, and while working keeps his stones in cold water to refresh them. Any object extracted from the victim's body is thrown into a creek or lagoon to ensure that its harmful effects are neutralised. Conversely, the sorcerer's work is associated with heat and dryness. He often heats an object before inserting it in the victim's body. ...Many techniques of sorcery involve heating, burning or drying the victim's urine, faeces or soiled clothes. (Reid 1978:102)

environment. Feelings can physically enter another person and produce real, observable effects. Emotions may cause illness in another person. For example, Gabriel Jordan, a UAM adherent, believes that in the past she has caused serious illness and even death in people towards whom she harboured bad feelings. Her emotions have efficacy because her *munda* (belly) is spiritually linked to the Sturt Creek waterhole which never dries up or loses its potency.

Aboriginal people's relationship to the cosmos was (and still is for older people in Halls Creek) a relationship with an intimate known, not an infinite unknown, a nameless mystery. They considered themselves part of a finite cosmos in which all life-forms were consubstantial and interdependent. These relationships were expressed in the idiom of kinship, for example, in Warlpiri cosmology, the Milky Way was a celestial Dreaming track that belonged to the Jungarrayi/Nungarrayi - Japaljarri/Napaljarri subsections (Jackson 1995:134).⁷

Conservative evangelical missionary discourse (about land and bodies) in East Kimberley today reveals the legacy of the hellenisation of Mediterranean culture with its devaluation of corporeality and its location of value, goodness and redemption in an other-world which transcends space, time and contingency.⁸ An understanding of the

⁷ The dogma of dreaming states that all the world is known and can be classified within the taxonomy created by the ancestral heroes. ...In the *jukurrpa* [dreaming] was established an all-encompassing Law which binds people, flora, fauna and natural phenomena into one enormous interfunctioning world. (Bell 1983:91)

⁸ This is in contrast to the liberalising churches in Arnhem Land (Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Church) which are rediscovering the land-based spirituality of the early Hebrew traditions (see Chapter 8).

changing views of land in the ancient Near East and in the hellenising world is therefore necessary.

Agricultural/city-state views of land

Mediterranean religions in the 4th millennium BC, before being embroiled in imperial expansion, were agricultural/city-state religions. European religions also at the time of Christianisation were agricultural in orientation. The agrarian Mother-Earth/Father-Sky cosmology had widespread currency in the ancient world from the Mediterranean to the Celtic and Germanic north (Berger 1985:2; Branston 1957:52-55,77; Hopkins n.d:19-20). Life-forms, both celestial and earthly, were generated from the primordial sexual union of Earth and Sky.⁹

With the rise of the city-states and a hierarchical social order, the Sky elevated itself into a position of superiority and dominance over the Earth. Already in the Sumerian documents of circa 3300 BC the Sky has appropriated all fecunding powers to himself reducing the Earth to a passive receptacle of his mighty inseminations (Allegro 1977:90-124; Baring and Cashford 1991:274,282; Berger 1985:11; Leiss 1972:27-33; Merchant 1980:16-19).

⁹ Heaven and Earth were once one form, and when they had been separated from one another, they gave birth and brought up into the light all things: trees, birds, beasts, and spawn of the sea, and race of mortals. (Euripides c.485-406 BC, Frag.484, *Melanippe*, cited in Martin 1987:6,7)

While it is well known that at one point in Egypt's cosmological development, the sky was female and the earth male (that the cosmos was, in fact, a milking cow), when the politico-cosmic structures began to hierarchise and the sky gained superiority over the earth, the sky became male. Egypt was also the first civilisation to develop the notion of the universal rule of one (male) god, i.e. monotheism (see p 27).

In the kingdom creation stories, the earth which has become disorderly, chaotic and threatening, is subdued and brought under male control by the young, transcendent warrior-gods (Zeus, Marduk, Baal, Indra, Yahweh and Horus). In less hierarchical agricultural societies, the Earth-Mother retained her fertilising and nurturant powers for much longer (Berger 1985:5-12; Dexter 1990:11).

The Israelites

"The fate of the land is the focal point of Biblical historiography" (Weinfeld 1993:xv). The theme of inheritance of the land pervades the patriarchal narratives, the accounts of the Exodus and the stories of conquest recorded in the Old Testament. However, perceptions of land changed as Israel became engulfed by successive waves of imperial and acculturating forces.

Refugees from the collapsing cities of the Egypto-Canaanite empire began entering the central hill country of Palestine in the 13th and 12th centuries BCE. They were agriculturalists and disaffected urbanites who were Canaanite in culture and religion. They worshipped the Canaanite state god, El, but also maintained their own family and clan ancestral altars. Re-establishing a sense of place in a new land entailed the relocation of ancestral bones and cult places, and the construction of elaborate genealogies and foundation stories (Weinfeld 1993:12-15,34).

Politically, Israel became a loose confederacy of agrarian city-states, each with their own petty rulers and rural clan organisations. A flowering of cults and deities sprang out of this diversity. Saul

transformed the hill country "tribes" into a national state, elevating Yahweh, the young warrior-god of the southern tribes, rather than the Canaanite El to the position of national deity.¹⁰ Anti-Canaanite ideology was part of the separation and boundary-marking process of Israelite nation building (Ahlstrom 1993:388-439; Axelsson 1987:158-161; van der Toorn 1993:531-536; Weinfeld 1993:96). Yahweh appropriated El's characteristics of age, dignity and kingly wisdom (Day 1992:38).

David's reign generated many of the conquest stories recorded in the Old Testament. His ambitions were imperialistic and as Egyptian hegemony declined, Canaan and many of the neighbouring states came under Israel's jurisdiction. Jerusalem, the old Canaanite city, was remade into a cultic centre for a national Yahwistic monotheism (Ahlstrom 1986:95, 96).¹¹ The period of monarchy that lasted only around 400 years was the high point of Israel's territorial expansion and political power, a time that has been looked back on ever since as a golden age, a time of God's favour and divine blessings.

¹⁰ Yahweh was known before the Israelite monarchy, in a Ugaritic myth, as "the god of certain fearsome warriors threatening the urban societies of Canaan" (de Moor 1990:216).

¹¹ Although melded together through military force, Judah and Israel continued to see themselves as independent social entities with separate foundation epics, prophetic traditions and religious-symbolic systems. After Solomon's death they rebelled against their forced union and split into two states with competing Yahwistic religions (Ahlstrom 1993:488-551; Peterson 1981:70-88). A national Yahwistic monotheism was never achieved during David's or Solomon's rule. The rural population continued to patronise local and regional cultic centres. Baal, Asherah and other lesser known gods (the names Nehushtan, Mot, Shemesh, Yareah, Deber and Rephesh have survived the editing practices of the post-exilic monotheists) were worshipped in Jerusalem during the reign of David. The kingdom of Judah (circa 960-587 BC) supported a national pantheon headed by the divine couple, Yahweh (or Yahweh-El) and Asherah (Ahlstrom 1993:477; Edelman 1996:19-20; Fritz 1995:145; Handy 1996:30-39).

After the failure of Israelite monarchy and empire, and especially the Babylonian deportations (587-539 BC),¹² the connection between king, god and territory began to unravel. The exilic community developed a new relationship to Yahweh, unmediated by kingship and statehood, yet inextricably linked to the imagined glory of the Davidic dynasty. The Israelites were the Chosen People of Yahweh, and the Covenant became the focal point around which the exiles constructed their narratives of achievement and failure. Land tenure (and land expansion) was linked to covenant-keeping and land loss to covenant-breaking.

The defeat of the Babylonian empire by the Persians (538 BC) and the consequent return of (some) of the exiles to Palestine was interpreted by the Israelites in terms of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. However, the returnees were not free to reoccupy their old territory as the land was now inhabited by various groups who later came to be known as Samaritans (Ahlstrom 1986:105,107). The returnees concentrated mainly in Jerusalem, rebuilding the city and the temple. In the Yahweh-Israelite ideology of the returnees, there was a shift in emphasis from land to city (Weinfeld 1993:201-206). Jerusalem became a metonym for all of Israel, and attempts were made to re-establish an organic connection between Yahweh, royalty and place. The potency of God was centralised and purified (made holy) in the city-centred Temple traditions.

¹² Normally only the ruling elite was deported. The section of the population exiled by the Babylonians included the royal household, court officials, priests, scribes, skilled artisans and military personnel (Ahlstrom 1993:786-798; Horsley 1995:26-31). These were the classes most strongly affiliated with the worship of Yahweh-El, and their religious and literary traditions went with them into exile (Ahlstrom 1993:845; Edelman 1996:19). The peasants, who were not strongly assimilated to the state religion, remained on the land.

The Jews who remained in Babylon throughout Persian imperial rule (538-333 BC) were not unaffected by the politico-religious developments taking place. Cyrus' successors, Darius and Xerxes, with pretensions to divine universal rulership, adopted Zoroastrianism as their state religion and elevated its deity, Ahuramazda, to "God of the Heavens" (Edelman 1996:22-23).¹³ The Babylonian Yahweh of the priestly Torah and Rabbinic writings, developing under the influence of imperialistic Zoroastrianism, also began to acquire qualities of transcendence, cosmic creator-rulership and universal goodness. This God was introduced to the Palestine returnees by Ezra and his group of law-makers from the Babylonian-Persian court.¹⁴

Macedonian imperial expansion (333 BC - 30 BC) destroyed the Greek city-states which had remained independent (and flourishing) throughout Persian imperial rule. The Jewish experience of exile which unravelled the organic connection between king, god and territory became the normal human condition for the new Greek subjects of empire. When the king as vital centre of social and cosmic order was displaced by a regent from a foreign imperial court, even the homeland was in diaspora (Smith 1978:xv). Sociopolitical expansion

¹³ Amun-Re, supreme god of imperial Egypt before Akhenaten (1353-1335 BC) imposed the strictly monotheistic regime of Aten upon his subjects and vassal states, also had the title, "Lord of the Heaven" (de Moor 1990:49).

¹⁴ According to Edelman (1996:20-22) and others, it was during this period of Persian imperial expansion that the relationship between the victorious and defeated gods (i.e. the gods of the victorious and defeated nations) changed. Rather than being subordinated to the new empire god, and assigned to the category of lesser deity (Yahweh was demoted in this way after the Assyrian defeat of Israel in 721 BC), they became incorporated into the being of the Supreme Deity. Thompson (1996:115-116) refers to this theological innovation as "inclusive monotheism" in contrast to the later development of exclusive monotheism. It was in the interests of both Persia and the exiled Israelites to assimilate Yahweh to the generic god of heaven. For Persia, the cults of the vassal states had to be brought into line with the universal rulership of Ahura Mazda and it was for this reason that Ezra, a court official, was sent to Palestine by Xerxes to regularise worship at the Jerusalem Temple. By equating Yahweh with Ahura Mazda, the Israelites were more likely to have their request (to rebuild the temple) favourably received (Ahlstrom 1993:856-887; Bolin 1996:128-135).

and removal of boundaries was experienced locally as a deficiency of order and meaning and diminished personal agency. The forces of chaos subdued and controlled by the king and city-state jurisdiction were once again being unleashed.

Ptolemaic cosmology mirrored (and attempted to remedy) the deficiencies and depletions of terrestrial-human existence caused by the universalising body politic. With its roots in Sumerian-Babylonian astrological divination, Ptolemy's cosmology transferred order and meaning away from the capricious and unpredictable earthly realm to the aloof, unchanging realm of the ever-circling planetary spheres (Martin 1987:158).

During the Hellenistic period (circa 333 BC - 100 AD) the religions of the Mediterranean region were transformed from polis or national religions (that is, religions of place) to universal religions (or religions of placelessness). (See Jonathan Smith 1978 on locative and utopian religions.) From the Apocalyptic Wisdom tradition¹⁵ to Gnostic spirituality, the hellenistic religions disinvested the corporeal-terrestrial world of spiritual values and invested them in a noncorporeal and incorruptible celestial realm.

The displaced aristocracy of the Greek city-states sought salvation from earthly existence by initiation into Mystery cults which by-passed the official state deities in favour of the older chthonic (and often feminine) deities of the dead and of regeneration. Under the influence of hellenisation, these deities were transformed into wandering

¹⁵ The Wisdom literature (960 BC - 100 AD), a product of the upper classes in Jerusalem, reflects the disruptions to courtly life caused by a universalising politico-cosmic order.

(boundary-crossing) saviour gods who traversed the dark underworlds on their journey to the bright celestial realms, providing safe passage for the souls of the dead (Kohler 1923:46-48; Martin 1987:59).

New Testament views of land (spiritualised)

Christianity, as a hellenistic religion, inherited the worldview and concerns of the hellenised East. For the Palestinian returnees, God was again located in his Temple, but the Diasporic Jews did not look towards the rebuilding of an earthly city and temple. They worshipped the "God of the Heavens" whose jurisdiction transcended earthly boundaries. Hellenistic Judaism spiritualised all references to land, cities and temples as dwelling places for God (Weinfeld 1993:213). God's residence (and the future residence of the Jewish faithful) was the "heavenly Jerusalem".

Paul, a Diasporic Jew, helped to mould the Palestinian Jesus movement into a hellenised form (Theissen 1992:93). His letters to the new churches, dating from around 51 AD are the earliest literary sources of Christianity (Martin 1987:119). Paul subscribes to Ptolemaic cosmological theory, and uses the terminology and imagery of the initiatory Mystery cults in his epistles (Margerie 1993:3-12). His saviour was a "cosmic Christ" who toured through underworlds and ascended to the heavenly realm to sit at the right hand of God.¹⁶

¹⁶ Boyarin (1994:7-12) argues that although Paul was motivated by a hellenistic striving towards universalism which produced "a spiritualising and allegorising" reading of the Hebrew scriptures, Christianity as a new religion (separated from the hellenistic Judaisms) developed only after Paul's death.

The early (Catholic) Church Fathers incorporated:

Neo-Platonist philosophy into the heart of Christian theology. Thus, body-soul dualism, a down-grading of the value of the body and the material world, an asceticism rooted in the denial of sexuality, and ultimately a profound denial of the finality of human death became rooted in Christian theology and, through the church, flowed into the western European cultural tradition. (Collins 1995:104)

The Medieval European politico-cosmic order, although hierarchical, had remained organic and holistic. All life-forms, including human, were interconnected. However, a major paradigm shift occurred with the development of 16th century Renaissance humanism, Descartes' mechanistic philosophy, the scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries and the Enlightenment (Collins 1995:25,119; Merchant 1980:100). Nature came to be seen as "a system of dead, inert particles moved by external forces" (Merchant 1980:193).

Although developed by 17th century natural philosophers, this mechanistic view of nature has its roots in a Western mathematical tradition going back to Plato (Merchant 1980:290). Descartes' Platonic mathematical universe which functioned "entirely mechanically according to mathematical necessities" was further elaborated by Newtonian physics and Leibnizian philosophy (McFague 1987:9; Sheldrake 1990:37). A mechanistic philosophy of nature in which matter is rendered passive and inert has justified a human-world relationship which is characterised by domination and subordination.

The development of a mechanistic cosmology was not unrelated to the changing politico-economic order, for example, the transition from subsistence and craft production to pre-industrial capitalism in

the 17th century (Merchant 1980:163,178). Weber's (1985) sociology of religion, particularly his linking development of Western capitalism with a Protestant work ethic, is no doubt relevant here. However, Weber's commitment to a larger project of writing an historical sociology of civilisations, and his assertion of a transhistorical Reason, lead him to postulate a universal-historical process of rationalisation which ends in irreversible completion and closure. Weber's teleological and totalising history suppresses diversity, conflict and struggle and does not allow for a return of repressed rationalities (Dean 1994:84,98).

Missionaries' views on land/land rights

Conservative evangelical missionary discourse about corporeal-terrestrial existence is permeated not only with a Platonic denigration of materiality but also with a post-Enlightenment devaluation of organic bodily processes.¹⁷ Their discourse about land and bodies also reveals the tension that exists in the Kimberley between Aboriginal groups who are lobbying for land justice and regional autonomy and the other-worldly goals of conservative evangelical Christianity in Halls Creek.

The following is a selection of quotations from Assemblies of God (AOG) sermons:

Moses was offered the Land of Milk and Honey. It was much better land than the Kimberleys. Moses said, "Land doesn't

¹⁷ There is a difference between the UAM and AOG churches here. The AOG view is Platonic and Cartesian, in contrast to the UAM church which expounds a Pauline dualism (see Boyarin 1994 on Pauline dualism).

satisfy me. You can give me the whole of Israel, but I want you, Lord. (Pastor Daniel)

We don't belong to the world. We live in the world, but we don't belong in the world. This is just a temporary place. The real permanent home is up there in heaven. (Pastor Tim)

God has no desires for the things of this earth. God desires souls alone. God's Kingdom is a kingdom of souls. (Bro. Phillip)

Why strive for a little bit of dirt when we own the whole world. We will rule in the new earth. (Bro. Phillip)

If you want land, you just look for it in heaven. (Pastor Tim)

Aboriginal Christian statements, on the other hand, while echoing the missionaries' views, reveal a preoccupation with spatiality and context, especially the connection between people, places and events.

Satan used to be the bright and morning star before, but he bin want to boss over everyone, so God bin make two places then: heaven and earth, one for God and one for Satan. Satan is playing around here, on earth now. (LP)

We shouldn't be looking for land. This land belongs to the Devil. Devil is the ruler of the ground and God is the ruler of the sky. This whole earth will be burned up soon, and we'll go to heaven. (CL)

What for you chasing Land Rights? God made the heaven and the earth. Land Rights can't give you land. Only God can give you land. You shouldn't look for land. God will give you the Promised Land. (YS)

Summary

In this chapter I have looked at changing concepts of land, bodies and flows of life from hunter-gatherer cosmologies to agricultural/city-state and empire-world politico-cosmic orders. In line with changing politics and cosmologies, a holistic and organic model of the universe has given way to atomic, mechanistic world views. And our (Western) history, a history of hierarchising social orders, warring and empire-building, has become a story of human dispossession and dislocation, "an increasingly bodiless and placeless tale" (Casey 1993:46).

In Chapter 2, I examine the hierarchisation and universalisation of Mediterranean cosmologies, and their transition from land-based to heaven-based religions. I look at the changes and disruptions that occurred when a dualistic (two-worlds) religion attempted to Christianise and civilise people who practised agricultural religions (in Europe) and hunter-gatherer religions (in Aboriginal Australia).

CHAPTER 2

SPIRIT WORLDS

The Mediterranean spirit world

In the beginning, the divine [for the Sumerians] was not something transcendent and distinct from animal or tree or plant, but ... a power at the centre of its being, the vital force causing it to be and making it thrive and flourish (Armstrong 1981:10).

Mesopotamian gods were chthonic and agrarian, and in organic relationship with human-terrestrial existence, dispensing blessings (that is, the powers of fertility and growth) upon all life forms.¹ In the early Ugaritic texts, El's (or Ilu's) dwelling place was not heaven but "at the source of the rivers" (Day 1992:37).² Likewise, in ancient Crete, Zeus was decidedly chthonic. It was only in Homer's period that he became a heavenly deity (Russell 1977:123).

i. Hierarchising the gods

In the 4th millennium BC with the rise of the Mesopotamian city-states, agricultural gods became hierarchised and divorced from the organic world of fecundity, growth and decay. The Mediterranean upper classes "elevated and humanised their gods, turning them into

¹ Sumerian stories tell how "the god Enki masturbates, ejaculates, and fills up the Tigris with flowing water... and uses his penis to dig irrigation ditches" (Eilberg-Schwartz 1994:86).

² Ugarit, an ancient Syro-Palestinian city and trade centre, was incorporated into the Hittite empire as a vassal state during the 2nd millennium BC, and destroyed by invading states in the 12th century BC. Ugaritic has close language ties to Hebrew-Phoenician and Aramaic, and its religion reflects the socio-political ferment taking place at this time in the ancient Near East (Ahlstrom 1993:288-293; Jobling 1992:156; van Soldt 1992:374). The El-Baal rivalry (i.e. the rivalry between the venerable creator god and the young aggressive warrior god) which found its way into the Old Testament, began its literary career in the Ugaritic texts (de Moor 1990:71-74).

a magnified landed aristocracy, inhabiting high heaven" (Armstrong 1981:10).

Mountain tops became the preferred residences of the newly ascendant gods, that is, before they left the earthly realm altogether. The Olympian family of the Homeric epics organised human life from the heights of Mt. Olympus. Yahweh initially commanded his people from Mt. Sinai, later (during David's reign) moving to Mt. Zion, the site of the royal temple in the city of Jerusalem.

Problems with high gods

A major problem with high gods is lack of accessibility. However, in Israel this did not become a problem until the 8th and 7th centuries BC when ancestral cults began to be suppressed in the interests of unification and centralisation of power. Cults of the dead were patronised by all classes of society in Israel and Judah (as in the Mediterranean region generally) throughout the period 1200 - 586 BC.³ The potent dead (*elohim*) were believed to have protective, revivifying and fructifying powers and were consulted at shrines (*bet elohim*) and "high places",⁴ especially in times of sickness and uncertainty (Bloch-Smith 1992:109-146).⁵

³ Attempts by later monotheistic editors to delete (or obscure) reference to these practices in the Hebrew literature have not been entirely successful (see 1 Sam 1:11,24; 1 Sam 28:13; 2 Sam 4:12; 2 Kgs 13:20-21).

⁴ "High places" (i.e. altars built at places of high altitude) and fortified towers were installed and patronised by wealthy land and flock owners. See, for example, the Shiloh traditions in 1 Sam 1:24 (Zertal 1994:63,64).

⁵ It was not until the fall of the northern kingdom (Israel) to Assyria in 721 BC and the consequent influx of refugees into Jerusalem that opposition to cults of the dead began to be expressed by the central government authorities. The Hezekian-Josianic reforms included prophetic denunciation of ancestral veneration, portrayal of the dead as inappropriate sources of power and knowledge, elimination of mediums and the re-education of priests and itinerant prophets (Bloch-Smith 1992:131).

In Greece, *daimones* (spirits of the dead), both central (that is, ancestral) and peripheral (wild/dehumanised) were given a new emphasis from the time of Homer. As well as being sources of power and knowledge in their own right, they take on a mediating role between humans and the hierarchising state deities. The heroic dead who were believed to possess especial potency, became the most popular intermediaries during the classical Greek period.

Israelite intermediaries

In early Mesopotamian city-state societies, the state deity (like the king) had a council of elders or court of law which decided the fate of the souls of the dead. In the early Hebrew confederacy, this heavenly court was called *bene ha-elohim*, the "sons of God" (Russell 1977:184).⁶ They were not God's creation but were his offspring formed by sexual generation from his own body.⁷ God was not outside of and distinct from the organic world.

During the Babylonian captivity when the Israelites' exiled national deity was exposed to the transcendence and majesty of the Persian imperial "God of the Heavens", the *bene ha-elohim* were recategorised as angels of God (Day 1992:39; Edelman 1996:23; Russell 1977:186).⁸ They were not his offspring but were the handiwork of a

⁶ Or the "sons of the gods". The term *elohim* shifts in meaning from "the dead" to "the gods" to "God" in line with the changing politico-cosmic structures.

⁷ In the Ugaritic texts, El's (Ilu's) consort is Athirat (Asherah), a goddess of fecundity and growth (Day 1992:40). As well as appropriating El's attributes of age, dignity and kingly wisdom, Yahweh appears to have taken over his consort. Tomb and jar inscriptions attributed to Israel's monarchic period (1000-587 BC) refer to "Yahweh and his Asherah" (Gerstenberger 1996:33-35). This has been edited out of the Hebrew Bible by the later (post-exilic) monotheists (see Edelman 1996:16,17).

⁸ Israel's heavenly court also took on the dimensions of the Babylonian court of justice, i.e. the accuser (or prosecutor) stood on the right of the accused and the defender on the left. Satan, one of the *bene ha-elohim*, became a prosecutor in the heavenly court of

creator craftsman who stood outside and above his creation. The angelic hierarchy formed a chain of invisible intermediaries between heaven and earth.

The hellenistic Mediterranean world (c 333 BC - 100 AD) which had denigrated corporeal-terrestrial existence was in urgent need of access to heavenly places. Jewish hellenistic writings appropriated stories and characters from the ancient Israelite traditions, reworking them to fit present needs. Power and knowledge were key issues in the Jewish hellenistic texts. Moses, Solomon and Enoch who had a demonstrated intimacy with the divine, were appropriated as powerful intermediaries who made cosmic journeys to the celestial realm to penetrate its secrets and release spiritual power for the benefit of humans (Mills 1990:73,91,125).

As intermediaries became deified and hierarchised over time, new mediators were generated to fill the gap and to meet new needs. Jesus, after his death, became a hellenistic Jewish intermediary in the tradition of Moses, Solomon and Enoch (Mills 1990:94,95). After Christianity moved to Europe, the intermediaries being generated were no longer Jewish, but European.⁹ Their concerns also had more to do with the fertility of the earth than with prising secrets from the celestial realm. European religions had not been dislocated from the organic world of fecundity, growth and decay, and activation of energising power was a major focus of religious practice (Berger 1985:5).

Yahweh-El (Kluger 1967:142).

⁹ See section titled *The Mediterranean spirit world moving into Europe*.

ii. **Civilising the gods: from a kin-based to a city-state morality**

Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all of the acts that are a disgrace and a shame to men: stealing, adultery, and deceiving one another (Xenophanes of Colophon, d.470 BC, quoted in Diels 1951:132).

In ancient Greece, ancestral gods, like their human descendents, adhered to a family/kin-based polity and morality. Honour was a central value. Loyalty (and many other values) were invested in one's kin group, and intergroup relations were characterised by rivalry and competition. One could legitimately engage in theft and fraud, cheating, lying and personal injury in order to outwit one's opponents and humiliate one's enemies.

During Homer's period (8th century BC), independent city-states were engaged in continuous warfare in order to accumulate wealth and prestige and expand territorial boundaries. The family honour ethic with its idiom of kinship was extended to include all the country within one's current borders. Gods and humans alike displayed the military virtues of courage, endurance and heroic self-sacrifice in pursuit of glory and honour for the fatherland.

In the 8th and 7th centuries BC, Israel developed a military culture. Yahweh was a warrior god who required just behaviour towards other Israelites but incited ruthless destruction of the enemy (Baring and Cashford 1991:440-443; Russell 1977:178). Yahweh promoted reciprocity ethics, conducting vendettas against opposing groups (Halpern 1991:12) and practising sorcery on his enemies (Brown 1972:127-128).

However, with internal pacification of conquered countries by centralised monopolies of violence, a culture of militarism within one's own boundaries was no longer appropriate. The creation of a civil society became a subject for intellectual debate, and in classical Athens Plato's ideal state was the setting for discussions of appropriate behaviour for men and gods.

Loyalty to polis or state was given a higher value than loyalty to family/kin group. The good citizen required a different set of values from those esteemed by the good kinsperson. And military virtues were denigrated in favour of the civic virtues of reason, justice, temperance and wisdom (Prior 1991:195). Van der Horst (1991:64,68) discusses the "central Jewish values" of "justice, gentleness, worthiness, self-control, decency, chastity, faithfulness, piety, and not grieving or causing harm to anyone" which were displayed on Jewish epitaphs from 300 BC to 700 AD.

Justice, which had been negotiated within a partisan context and within an ethic of reciprocity, was universalised and raised to the status of an independently existing moral concept. In Greek literature, Zeus was transformed into a god of justice (Bergmann 1992:5). And the just god of the Israelite prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, could no longer impose an ethic of corporate liability and retribution on humans (Halpern 1991:15).

Plato's concept of the Good, and the subsumption of the gods under this first principle, led to the suppression of features of the gods that were no longer appropriate in civilian life.¹⁰ The Good, as a principle

¹⁰ The kin-based morality of Homer's gods could no longer be tolerated. Homer's

of coherence designed to dispel contingency, uncertainty and changeableness, subjugated other features of social life such as alternative (especially local) ways of being and knowing.

Problems with good gods

If the gods are good and do no wrong, what is the cause of evil in the world?

In Greek literature, *daimones* (unlike the transformed state deities) continued to adhere to a family honour morality and an ethic of reciprocity. They were capricious, deceitful, easily offended, inclined to maliciousness and prone to retribution. They displayed towards humans the "traditional" emotions of avarice, jealousy and anger-revenge. After the high gods (and the ruling classes) adopted a city-state morality, the *daimones* were portrayed in literature in increasingly negative and derogatory terms although their popularity as agents of cosmic power continued unabated (Gager 1992:113-115; Russell 1977:142). The problem of evil became acute in Plato's philosophy, but it was his pupil, Xenocrates, who resolved the problem by recategorising the *daimones*, who had lost credibility with the upper classes, as the agents of evil (Burkert 1987:179,325,332; Russell 1977:142).

The Mediterranean world above/world below dualism provided a basic framework on to which many other dualisms could be grafted. The socio-political good/evil (that is, ally/enemy) opposition of the

poems were to be excluded from Plato's ideal republic and he himself consigned (as dreamed by Pythagorus) to Hades, where he was depicted suspended from a tree and surrounded by serpents (Wiles 1994:23).

warring city-states was cosmicised and absolutised by Zoroastrianism. Pythagorean-Platonic spirit/matter dualism was also universalised and grafted on to the schema by the Orphic mystery circles.

During the hellenistic period when evil became universalised and pervasive, the Jews needed an explanation to account for its origins. The Hebrew *bene ha-elohim* who were transformed from sons of God to angels during the Persian empire, made another transition, this time in the direction of evil. No longer the offspring of God, partaking of his (good) Divine nature, the *bene ha-elohim* became subject to corruption. Their sins were catalogued by the Jewish Apocalyptic writers. The *bene ha-elohim* had lusted after and mated with earthly women, producing a race of giants. At this time, it was not so much the act of sexual intercourse that was sinful, but the illegitimate intermingling of the categories of heaven and earth, and the revelation of heavenly secrets to the daughters of men (Brown 1978:75; Eilberg-Schwartz 1994:225-226).

Satan, one of the *bene ha-elohim* in Israel's early theocracy, became during the Babylonian exile, a prosecutor in the heavenly court of Yahweh-El. He was transformed in later Apocalyptic literature into an opponent and accuser of God himself, lying in court and obstructing the path of truth. He and his followers tempted humanity to sin and were cast down from heaven and bound in a pit (Russell 1977:190-204).

This Apocalyptic Satan became the Devil of the Christian New Testament. The Hebrew Satan was translated into Greek as *diabolos*, from which came the Latin *diabolus* and the English "devil" (Russell 1977:33-35). In hellenistic Judaism and in the Christian writings, this

Satan-Devil has become the principle of evil. All practitioners of evil (demons, sorcerors, heretics, idolators) come under his command. The cosmic struggle between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan becomes a central theme of Christianity (Russell 1977:231).

iii. Centralisation and monotheism

From the time of the earliest Mesopotamian city-states, centralisation and decentralisation of legitimised (divinised) power and violence has occurred. The development of state military apparatuses with hierarchical chains of command and obedience enabled extension of territory and the creation of kingdoms. By the 3rd millennium BC Sumerian cities were walled forts (Dudley 1991:58).

Empires waxed and waned. Aspiring emperors attempted to establish monotheistic theocracies, that is, to elevate their own chosen deity to the position of universal god, in order to unify territories and consolidate power. Akhenaten (1353-1335 BC) imposed a strictly monotheistic regime over the Egyptian empire by promoting the sun god, Aten, to the position of Supreme Being, naming himself as Aten's son, and suppressing all other deities (de Moor 1990:42-44; Silverman 1991:81,82). Aten was independent of earthly existence, not born of woman, and requiring no reciprocal relationship with humans.

During Persian imperial rule (538-333 BC), Darius and Xerxes, with universalist pretensions, elevated Ahuramazda to "God of the Heavens", claiming to rule the whole world in his shadow (Dunn 1965:131). The divine universal rulership of Aten and Ahuramazda

ceased when the earthly dynasties or empires fell.

An exclusive national Yahwism was promoted during Israel's period of military expansion in the 8th and 7th centuries BC.¹¹ This process was accelerated after the Assyrian defeat of the northern kingdom in 721 BC. Old rural patrilineages were dismantled, their genealogical links to the land severed and the ancestral cults suppressed (Halpern 1991:27). A centralised state cult was established at Jerusalem, the centre of political power. The individual, and his diminished extended family, was prised from the once powerful patrilineages and related directly to the state and the state deity (Bloch-Smith 1992:131; Halpern 1991:71).¹² However, the idiom of kinship was too useful to be discarded. The king was as a father to his people, and God was both father and king.

Ancestral shrines and "high places" were stripped of mystical potency which was appropriated, hierarchised and purified into a centralist cult of holiness. Cults of the dead were no longer acceptable features of the Jerusalem Temple cult (Bloch-Smith 1992:147). The holy, which was radically discontinuous with ordinary human existence, must also be protected from contamination by living, organic human beings (Armstrong 1981:6). The holiness of Yahweh, secluded within the Temple complex, was rendered inaccessible to all but a priestly few.

Psychic centralism is intimately connected with the development of political and cultic centralism (Armstrong 1981:8). "Life-force" in early

¹¹ This expanded into an inclusive universal monotheism only during the Persian period (Edelman 1996:21-23).

¹² Anti-royalism, however, was widespread amongst the classes which were unable to benefit from centralisation of political and spiritual power (de Moor 1990:182-186).

Hebrew thought (as in early Egyptian and Greek thought) was not a bounded, individualised and psychologised soul, but an energy that flows between life-forms.¹³ As a non-renewable but never-extinguished resource, it was transferred or recycled from one generation to the next. A person's life-force was vulnerable to outside forces, particularly to the actions of other people, and could increase in strength or weaken, or be lost altogether (Fontaine 1986:44; Moltmann 1992:40-43; Sullivan 1995:54).

Over the centuries as the Mediterranean political and cosmic structures changed, ideas about life-force also underwent a transformation. During the Homeric period, a person's life-force became more psychologised, though still dispersed and interactive (Bremmer 1983:54,55; Sullivan 1995:54-76). With hierarchisation and universalisation of the body politic and the cosmos (and the development of a world above/world below dualism), the life-force became incorporeal and immortal, a small portion of the divine imprisoned within the corporeal body whose destiny was to reunite with divinity (Sullivan 1995:108,109).

In response to political and religious centralisation, the human life-force became unified, individualised and bounded, the bearer of virtues (whether military or civilian) and the locus of an "inner life" that sought purification and release from bodily appetites by contemplation of transcendent divinity (Bremmer 1983:69; Brown 1990:22; Steel 1978:40-43).¹⁴

¹³ Hebrew *ruach*
 Egyptian *ka*
 Greek *thumos*

¹⁴ Paul makes a distinction in Romans 7:22-23 between the members of his body and his "inner self": "For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self but I see in my members

The Mediterranean spirit world moving into Europe

Recategorising European gods as the demons of Christianity

Xenocrates' *daimones* (translated into English as "demons") retained the "traditional" attributes of periphery/boundary spirits (that is, involvement in unexplained misfortune, sickness, madness, climatic disasters and crop failure) as well as taking on the weight of cosmic evil.

When Christian missionaries entered Western Europe, they immediately "recognised" the local chthonic gods as demons. This recognition was achieved by a process of silencing and "disremembering". Local knowledge of European gods (especially knowledge of their positive attributes) was suppressed by the missionaries who had assimilated all spirit worlds into a cosmic dualism, and "disremembered" by the newly missionised. These attributes did not disappear, however, but were reincarnated into new Christianised forms.

Saints appropriating the positive attributes of European agrarian gods

Agricultural spirituality was concerned with the earth's fruitfulness. European agrarian deities dispensed blessings (that is, the powers of fertility and growth) upon ploughed fields, protected fields from malignant forces and healed both crops and humans of disease (Berger 1985). These powers of fecundity did not become redundant after

another law at war with the law of my mind" (see Boyarin 1994:62).

Europe had been Christianised.

When the European gods were recategorised as the demons of Christianity, the potent dead were transformed into saints (intermediaries between heaven and earth) rather than chthonic gods. The saints appropriated the fecunding powers of the grain deities, taking part in ploughing and sowing rituals, encircling the fields in the early spring to charm the land and energise the seed (Berger 1985:68, 69).

A 12th century grain miracle legend features the Virgin and Child passing by a grain field during their Flight into Egypt, causing a miraculous harvest. In Britain, France and Scandinavia, the grain miracle narrative was incorporated into the Biblical metanarrative, in particular the Nativity Cycle, allowing female procreative powers to continue to revitalise the earth (Berger 1985:90, 95).

The Devil appropriating the attributes of European wild gods

The New Testament Devil (and his demons) appropriated the physical attributes and appetites of the European wild (periphery/boundary) gods, that is, goatish demeanour, hairiness, horns, cloven hooves and huge penis (Russell 1977:126, 254). European phallic deities (the Greek Pan, Celtic Cernunnos, Slavic Ljeschie and Scottish Urisks) assisted, as it were, in localising and giving specific content to cosmic evil.

i. European models of God

Despite the continuing need for female generative powers in European agricultural communities, European models of God, like those of the Mediterranean cultures, were hierarchical, masculinist and dissymmetrical. Metaphors for God were borrowed from the Roman patriarchal family, absolute monarchy and nonagricultural labour. The God-world relationship was imagined in terms of a father/child model, a king/subject model and a creator/creation model.

In Roman patriarchal families, the father was a distant and awesome figure, the ruler of his household and the locus of family honour, requiring obedience and loyalty from his dependents/followers. The king as absolute ruler and as commander of the state military apparatus had the power of life and death over his subjects. The idiom of kinship was extended into the feudal relationship. Vassals were required to render homage and service to their king in return for fatherly provision and protection.

As the body politic and cosmos in Mediterranean cultures became hierarchised, and a world above/world below dualism developed, the gods departed from the organic realm of fecundity, growth and decay. The celestial realm which they entered was outside of and above human-terrestrial existence, a transcendent realm uncontaminated by change, contingency and corruption. The gods became ontologically self-subsisting and independent of human relationality. They eschewed organic bodily processes, no longer giving birth to life-forms by sexual (or asexual) generation. They became creator craftsmen,

moulding the world as a potter moulds his clay, later bringing the world into being by the creative word alone (Baring and Cashford 1991:420, 421).¹⁵

The Judaeo-Christian God who entered Europe was a transcendent creator God existing in radical independence of his created world. He was uncreated and self-subsisting, without lineage or family, and with no need of the world or anything outside of himself (Kaufman 1993:303). He created the world by his word alone, a world that was ontologically separate from his being and existence.¹⁶

The Mediterranean-European spirit world entering Australia

Recategorising Aboriginal spirits as the demons of Christianity

There are only two powers in this world, that of darkness and that of light. That of Satan and that of God. (Pastor John, UAM church, Halls Creek)

The Mediterranean world above/world below dualism with its hellenistic elaborations (spirit/matter dualism and good/evil dualism) provided a basic framework for Christian missionaries to categorise spiritual activity in regions outside of European Christendom. The Apocalyptic Satan who had become the principle of evil in hellenistic

¹⁵ Eilberg-Schwartz (1994:29) argues that there is a direct link between the disappearance of the divine phallus and "the emergence of the seminal word, what Lacan would call the Logos".

¹⁶ This perspective is alive and well today despite recent attempts by liberal theologians to dehierarchise the politico-cosmic order:

All Abramic religions contend that God is not dependent upon the universe. The universe is dependent upon God. He is the sovereign ruler of the universe; everything is subordinate to him. God is absolute, and all else is relative. We owe our existence to God; as created beings, we are finite, whereas God is infinite. There is therefore an absolute distinction between the creature and the Creator. (Hexham and Poewe 1997:108)

Judaism and Christianity, had an important part to play in making sense of “demonic” manifestations in Aboriginal Australia.

Satan, as the enemy of God and his Kingdom, tried to harm God by corrupting and destroying his creation. His aim was to abort God’s plan of salvation for humanity by misleading people and turning them away from God. According to UAM missionaries in Halls Creek, Satan diverts Western people from the things of God by entangling them in materialistic pursuits including current preoccupations with youth, beauty and health (HB).¹⁷ In Aboriginal societies, Satan’s approach has been more immediate and direct. By taking control of Aboriginal spirit worlds, through which he manifests himself in frightening guises, Satan has been able to keep Aboriginal people in a perpetual state of fear and bondage (HB).

The local spirits of Aboriginal religions have been brought under the command of Satan, the principle of cosmic evil. Only their negative attributes are “recognised” by European missionaries who have assimilated all foreign spirit worlds into the two-worlds dualism of the hellenised East.

God appropriating the positive attributes of Aboriginal spirits

Old people say family *mamu* always follow them and guide them. But now I know that God shows us the way. (EN)¹⁸

Mamu/juwarri (local spirits)¹⁹ have (or had, in the case of Protestant

¹⁷ Harriet Beattie, a white UAM adherent.

¹⁸ Elsa Numidi, UAM adherent.

¹⁹ *Mamu* - motile life-force/spirit of the dead (Jaru)
Juwarri - motile life-force/spirit of the dead (Gija)

Christians) a large helping repertoire in Halls Creek. They look after their own countrymen, protecting them from sickness and misfortune, bringing messages in dreams, warning them of danger, guiding them when they are lost. The spirits protect family belongings, find and return lost property, reveal food sources and heal sick relatives. When families travel, their spirits travel with them, taking the night watch, looking out for strangers and fighting enemy spirits.

When Aboriginal spirits were assigned to the Satanic realm by European missionaries and no longer available to help Aborigines who identified as Christians, a vast area of need opened up for which there was no help. Unlike the European Christianisation process which generated fecund saints and virgins to energise the crops, Christianising Aborigines have not been able to generate intermediaries from Aboriginal soil. Spirits of the dead who remained on earth were categorised as evil spirits by Protestant missionaries. Christian spirits were transported straight to heaven and were unavailable to meet human needs.

In Halls Creek Aboriginal Christianity, God has appropriated the helping repertoire of local Aboriginal spirits. The areas in which God involves himself are travel, local weather conditions, food supplies, protection of property, appropriate love affairs and healing. When Christians travel they should carry a Bible with them for protection. God's power, activated by prayer and singing, will keep both travellers and vehicle free of accident or breakdown. In the wet season, God is called upon to disperse gathering storm clouds, leaving the local area rainfree. God brings messages to people in dreams, gives signs (warnings) of events about to happen, finds lost property, shows

people where to find gold, guides people when they are lost, heals the sick and provides food. If Christians are looking for a life partner, they should pray to God and he will draw the right person to them.

God's power is not available for "sinful" enterprises however. People who wish to engage in card playing, drinking, inappropriate love affairs, corroborees, disco dancing, fighting and sorcery must look elsewhere for help. Evil spirits (non-Christian spirits of the dead) and idols (the gods of non-Christian religions) are often invoked for these purposes. For example, a Buddha statuette is a favoured good luck charm for card players.²⁰

The Devil appropriating the "negative" attributes of Aboriginal spirits

The Biblical Devil (and his demons) have appropriated some of the more questionable activities of local Aboriginal spirits, that is, questionable in terms of Christian missionary criteria of right spiritual conduct. *Mamu/juwarri* (spirits of the dead) "traditionally" paralysed people in order to give them special abilities so they could "see" the spirit world and access its powers. The *juwarri* then became the person's spirit helper. This calling bestowed a measure of prestige and power on the chosen person, although such positions were always fraught with spiritual danger.

²⁰ These have come from West Kimberley with its mixed descent Aboriginal/Asian populations, to whom Halls Creek people now have marriage ties. Robinson and Yu (1975) write of the Asian influence in West Kimberley card games. Robinson (1973) also writes about Aboriginal notions of luck:

A person wins at cards because he has good luck, and luck is considered to be tangible. Luck is something which is linked with the spirit-world and can be given to men by the *raiija* [local spirits]; according to some players, by the major culture heroes themselves. Bad fortune may be attributed to the malevolent *nari*. (1973:211)

This is also my experience of card playing in East Kimberley.

However, in the light of missionary teaching it has now become clear that *mamu*-demons paralyse people in order to seduce them from God's way and tempt them to return to their old traditional ways. The Devil only attacks Christians in this manner. He has no need to bother with sinners as they already belong to him. The Biblical Devil also poses as Aboriginal spirits of the dead in order to attract people to himself at a time when they are most vulnerable. People believe they are communicating with their dead when in fact they are being drawn ever deeper into thralldom to Satan.

For older Aboriginal Christians, however, the Biblical Devil and his demons *are* spirits of the dead who behave in much the same manner as Aboriginal spirits, that is, they follow their relatives, protecting them and warning them of danger. The demons are reprimanded by Jesus when they do wrong, for example, when many possess one man in a graveyard, inducing madness (Mark 5:1-21).

Localising God and the Devil

Conservative Protestant missionaries who recognise "only two [spiritual] powers in this world" have recategorised local Aboriginal spirits as the demons of Christianity. This recategorisation process, however, has not been a simple, straightforward matter. It has required a number of sleight of hand operations including the silencing and "disremembering" of local knowledges.²¹ Negotiation between different spiritualities has not been a possibility for

²¹ For example, Aboriginal Christians who have demonised (and discarded) their local spirits, deny that in the past they were called upon to heal sick relatives.

conservative evangelical Protestantism.

Because local Aboriginal spirits are no longer available to Christianising Aborigines as helping spirits, a vacuum of need has opened up which could not be filled by local or chthonic beings. In Protestant/Aboriginal relationships only the Christian God could be guaranteed as having sufficient goodness (and right intentions) to be able to help people. God has therefore had to take on local responsibilities in Halls Creek, often to the frustration of European missionaries who have allocated "higher" universal tasks to God.

Because the "negative" aspects of *mamu/juwarri* are not questioned by conservative Protestant missionaries, Aboriginal spirits continue to act at the local level, involving themselves in the unchristian pursuits of corroboree-making, love magic, payback killing, sorcery and making people mad (as well as more recent involvement in evangelical Christianity's catalogue of sins).

Reading the Christian spiritual hierarchy in terms of the station hierarchy

God is the boss. Angels are the workers. Satan was right hand man for God. But he wanted to be boss, so God bin throw him out. (LP)²²

The Christian spiritual hierarchy, developed in the Mediterranean and imported to Europe, was modelled on that of an absolute monarchy. It was a dominance-subservience model in which the king had absolute power, absolute authority and absolute rights over his

²² Laurie Peters, AOG adherent.

subjects (Kaufman 1968:136). The response required from subjects was submission to the sovereign's will, expressed publicly in worship (the rendering of homage and service) and in everyday attitudes of obedience and loyalty.

Monarchies in the Mediterranean societies with their military and civilian hierarchies were a development of city-state life. Aboriginal models of European polity and Christianity do not derive from monarchical systems but from their knowledge of station life which is itself informed by traditional Aboriginal categories. Kolig (1972:9) describes an Aboriginal model of European stratification within the Kimberley pastoral regions which he terms the "boss-system". Myers' (1986:223) observations on boss/worker relationships are also relevant here.

A "boss" is a person who "looks after" his mob and brings them to maturity. His followers in return should "work for him" and give him their allegiance. He may issue orders in certain contexts but is "unable to exercise absolute prerogatives". It rests with the "non-boss" to comply or not (Kolig 1972:9,11). The relationship between boss and worker is one of acknowledged interdependence rather than, as in monarchical systems, of stated independence (the monarch) and dependence (the subjects).

i. Aboriginal models of God

Boss/worker model

While Aboriginal Christians in Halls Creek see God as a "boss" who

“looks after” and protects his followers, he has both *gardiya* and blackfella aspects to his character. God has very little family, having no wife, but he nevertheless has thousands of followers in heaven, mainly angels. At night God puts angels around the Christians’ camps to protect them just as family *mamu* keep strange *mamu* out of Aboriginal camps by fighting them and telling them to go back to their own country. When a Christian dies, an angel will push their spirit up to heaven.

God as gardiya

If that mother not looking after her kids, Lord can take that baby away, and give it to nother mother *jarrinyba* [by reincarnation]. (JC)

In Halls Creek, God is white like a *gardiya*. He is said to have universal and civilised emotions, that is, he loves everyone. God is not jealous or capricious. He is kind, and forgives people when they pray to him. However, God can also be strict like a Welfare officer. If Christians “fall back” from God’s way and start drinking again, God can cut their Social Security payments back. If a mother is drunk, God can take her baby away and give it to someone else. For Aboriginal Christians, God is a *gardiya* and a coloniser par excellence, that is, he is both provider and destroyer. One day he will burn the whole world, and remove the Christians to heaven first, and from there to the New Jerusalem.

God as blackfella

Although God looks and behaves much like a *gardiya*, exhibiting universal and civilised attitudes and emotions, he frequently reverts

to a family/kin-based morality. For example, Walmajarri people engaged in translating the Old Testament Abraham story noted that Abraham broke the law by marrying his half-sister. But God loved him so sent him away from angry relatives who would try to take revenge (Sayers 1980:3,5). God here is not behaving as an absolute and impartial judge. He is taking sides.

God also exhibits the “traditional” emotions of jealousy, anger and sorrow-revenge. If Christians “fall back” from God’s way, God can curse them or send lightning to hurt them. He can turn his back so that the Christians no longer receive his protection and are vulnerable to malign outside forces. In this state, people can have car accidents or get bitten by dogs. He can make Christians (or their relatives) sick, imposing here an ethic of corporate liability and retribution.

God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit have got *mabarn* healing power (see Chapter 6). Jesus, when he lived on earth, did *mabarn* work, healing the sick, raising people from the dead, and clearing the area of strange spirits. Today the Holy Spirit continues this work.

Summary

In the Mediterranean region, the body politic and the cosmos together underwent a process of hierarchisation, universalisation and civilisation. Although the morality of the gods generally lagged behind that of the continually changing political structures, the fit is close enough for body politic and cosmos together to be referred to as a politico-cosmic order.

As the external politico-cosmic structures changed, so also did the interior landscape of the human body. As Bourdieu (1987:81), Deleuze (1992) and others have shown, the self is a folding of the Outside (the exterior relations of governance for example) back on oneself to form an Inside (Dean 1994:216). People who had been hierarchised, universalised and civilised on the Outside and Inside believed it was their duty to Christianise people with agricultural and hunter-gatherer politics and moralities. Chapter 3 focusses on Christian missionary activity in the East Kimberley of Western Australia with a discussion of the three churches in Halls Creek: Catholic, United Aborigines Mission (UAM) and Assemblies of God (AOG).

CHAPTER 3

COLONISATION AND MISSIONISATION

Boyarin (1994:6-8) argues that there is a direct connection between Christian universalism and European colonisation. In particular, he sees Paul's hellenistic inheritance as seminal in the production of the (Christianised) Universal Subject. Paul, nurtured in the Greco-Jewish culture of the 1st century AD, was inspired by a platonic desire for the One. This hellenistic impulse towards univocity was facilitated by allegoresis, that is, by a spiritualising and allegorising interpretation of particularistic (in this case, Hebrew) texts. Paul's desire was to erase ethnicity and descent as crucial markers of human identity in order to incorporate all of humanity as one into Christ's spiritual body.¹

Boyarin agrees with Castelli's (1991:87) assertion that the will to unity found in Pauline discourse is a will to power, and claims that Paul's universalist variety of Christianity (the variety that became the dominant form) has been "a powerful force for coercive discourses of sameness" and "seems to conduce to coercive politico-cultural systems" (Boyarin 1994:228, 233):

[Pauline universalism] contained the seeds of an imperialist and colonising missionary practice. The very emphasis on a universalism... turns very rapidly into a doctrine that

¹ Boyarin (1994:28, 67) argues against the current move for scholars in the Christian (particularly the Lutheran) tradition to de-emphasize Paul's hellenism. He sees these scholars as dissociating themselves from earlier schools of interpretation (now found to be tainted with anti-Semitism) which emphasized Paul's hellenism at the expense of his Jewishness. But for Boyarin, a Jew, the "pure Jewish cultural world that Paul grew up in was thoroughly Hellenised and platonised" (p 268).

[others] must all become part of our family of the spirit, with all of the horrifying practices against [Otherness] which Christian Europe produced. (Boyarin 1994:234)

Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:6-11) emphasize the contribution of the post-Enlightenment West to the colonisation of the non-European world: a process whereby "Europe set out to grasp and subdue the forces of savagery, otherness and unreason" (p 11). They place Protestant evangelical Christianity within this tradition of Western modernity. The "colonising thrust of European evangelists" into the non-Christian world was made "in the name of reason and righteousness, God and Great Britain" (p 309).²

The missionary imperative was not domination over physical spaces and economic processes, but the colonisation of consciousness: of Tswana language, culture and imagination.³ They promoted "the Empire of the Spirit", and their method for achieving this goal on African soil was Christian conversion (p 272). Their stated objective was to convert the soul, an entity which existed independently of Greco-Jewish historical and religious practices, from pagan laws and observances to Christ. But as Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:202) have shown, what the missionaries were doing in practice was fashioning in African bodies an "inner being" in the likeness of the Enlightenment bourgeois self. This self, though constructed according to the needs of the industrial capitalist world, had a "thoroughly classical Judaeo-Christian ancestry" (p 61, 179). Tswana consciousness was to be moulded by notions of rational individualism, self-

² The Comaroffs' study is a historical anthropology of two Nonconformist missions (London Missionary Society and Wesleyan Missionary Society) to the Southern Tswana in c. 1820-1920 (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:6).

³ Although the missionaries' role was primarily ideological, colonisation of land and economic production occurred as they established mission stations and agricultural projects.

discipline, regular work habits, and intellectual and social progress. Tswana subjectivities were to be enticed by the "colonising conversations" of evangelical missionaries into "modes of rational debate, positivist knowledge, and empirical reason" (p 213).

Although the evangelical missionaries sought to dissociate themselves from the mercenary and exploitative aspects of the colonisation process, they found themselves frequently drawn into frontier politics. A new frontier is an "unfolding set of power relations", and the borderland between the expansionist activities of the Boer settlers and the contracting world of the Southern Tswana was a place of intense political activity (p 273).

London Missionary Society (LMS) and Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS) missionaries were champions of British imperial rule, even when that rule became oppressive. They strenuously opposed Boer expansion from Cape Colony into the African interior, attempting on occasions to create sovereign states with British backing. To this end, John Philips, superintendent of the LMS in South Africa, made plans for the political future of Transorangia, beyond the Orange River on the borderland of Cape Colony. The missionaries also supported chosen chiefs in their claims to paramountcy over regional territories (p 267-292).

In the 1870s, LMS missionaries urged the British government to annex Bechuanaland to prevent it being absorbed into the Transvaal, and when it did, Mackenzie, a LMS missionary, was appointed as resident

Deputy Commissioner. The missionaries became agents of empire.⁴ John Moffat, another LMS missionary, became a native commissioner in the Transvaal, a resident magistrate in Basutoland and British Bechuanaland, Assistant Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and a British representative in Matabeleland (p 292-308).

The evangelists were not just the bearers of a vocal Protestant ideology, nor merely the media of modernity. They were also the human vehicles of a hegemonic worldview... their assault was driven by a universalising ethos whose prime object was to engage the Africans in a web of symbolic and material transactions that would bind them ever more securely to the colonising culture. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:310).

Missionary Societies in Australia

The first missionary societies to enter Australia were the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS). They were products of more than a century of Protestant evangelical revivalism which effloresced all over Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries in response to the rationalising discourses of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment. Religious Societies developing outside the state churches in England and Germany turned their backs on historical and literary criticism of Judaeo-Christian texts, nurturing instead a devotional religiosity which responded to the developing interiority of post-Renaissance European humanity.

⁴ I hope to see in the course of time - and to help bring about, as God may give me opportunity - a *United Confederated South Africa under the Queen, with a Territorial System of Government in outlying Native Territories under management of a Governor General and a South African Council*. (Mackenzie 1884:42-43 [original italics], cited in Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:294)

Colonised subjects, "under the careful tutelage of the evangelists, [were to become] willing citizens of Her Majesty's dominion" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:308).

The Religious Societies in England were dominated by High Anglican pietism and Calvinist Puritanism. The Calvinist doctrines emphasized an individualist redemption theology characterised by a personal sense of sin, Luther's "justification by faith", post-salvation holiness (demonstrated by good works), and an eschatological denouement (Gunson 1955:139). The German mystical pietism of Bohemia and Moravia which matured in the institutions of Halle and Herrnhut promoted emotionally intense religious experiences and chiliastic expectations and instituted fast days, love feasts and night watches (Thompson 1882:50).⁵

English Puritanism and German mystical pietism were ignited in the person of John Wesley to produce the 18th Evangelical Revival which swept through European Christendom spawning evangelistic fervour, Pentecostal experiences and chiliastic expectations. The publishing of Cook's Journals in 1784 inspired in the Evangelicals an almost romantic vision of missionary endeavour. The colonies had been revealed by Divine plan as a prelude to the imminent return of Christ. The successful progress of the Evangelical Revival led to a firm belief that the British nation was God's chosen people, charged with ushering in the Kingdom of God (Gunson 1955:25-48). Missionary societies, emerging from the Religious Societies of the pietistic era, sprang up all over the newly evangelised Christendom.

The LMS was founded in 1795 by evangelical Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists and Calvinist Independents. This interdenominational co-operation was not successful and in 1799 evangelical Anglicans

⁵ That is, watching for the Second Coming of Christ.

established the CMS of London. In the early years especially, the CMS used graduates of the German missionary institutes in its Australian work. The Wesleyan Missionary Society came into being in 1813 (Thompson and Johnson 1899:10).

From 1833, Rev. J.D. Lang, first Presbyterian minister in New South Wales and representative of the City of Sydney in the NSW Parliament, began soliciting missionaries from Germany to work in the Presbyterian-sponsored missions as he was unable to interest the British clergy to work amongst Australian Aborigines (Bardon 1949:12, 13). A Moravian-Presbyterian missionary partnership began in Victoria,⁶ and in 1838, Pastor Johannes Gossner, unorthodox Lutheran clergyman, former director of the Berlin Missionary Society and founder of the Gossner Missionary Institute, responded to Lang's call for missionaries to Queensland (Nolan 1964:1).⁷

In the 19th century, evangelical missionaries and government officials who still saw Europe as the *Corpus Christianum*, believed Christianity and European civilisation to be coterminous. European colonisation was God's great plan to Christianise and civilise the heathen world. For evangelicals who did not accept evolutionary biological theories, Aborigines had degenerated from an original civilised state. At the time of the Great Flood, Aborigines, as sons of Ham, had true religion and culture, but they deliberately neglected these and forgot the God of whom they had original knowledge.⁸

⁶ See Pepper, P. 1980 *You are what you make yourself to be: the Story of a Victorian Aboriginal Family, 1842-1980*.

⁷ Some of these missionaries later entered the Lutheran Church of Australia and found their Gossner origins a drawback to their complete acceptance by the purist Lutherans (Nolan 1964:1).

⁸ UAM pastors in Halls Creek still believe this today. See section titled **Earlier UAM missionaries' views of Aboriginal religions** in this chapter.

Colonial governments in Australia gave to the missions the task of incorporating Aboriginal people into colonial society and transforming them into the industrious working classes of the new economic and political order. The missionaries became agents of white colonisation. In 19th century England, the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church and the Society for the Suppression of Vice and Encouragement of Religion lobbied for the education of the poorer classes. That is, they wished to remove the children of the poor from the "debauched and slothful habits of their parents" and place them in the English Charity Schools to teach them the habits of industry, decency and submissiveness to fit them for their station in life. These convictions were carried to Australia and applied to Aboriginal people (Woolmington 1979:90,91).

Government officials took on missionary tasks and became members of missionary boards. Sir Ralph Darling, Governor of NSW in 1825, was exhorted by the Colonial Office to instruct Archdeacon Scott in his duties of Christianising and civilising the Aborigines (Woolmington 1979:125-130). Sir Thomas Brisbane (Patron) and Chief Justice Forbes (Vice-Patron) were founding members of the CMS Auxiliary of NSW formed in 1925 (CMS 1941:34). Governments not only subsidised missions but paid the passage money for some European missionaries and directly supported individual missionaries. The Aboriginal Protection Board of Western Australia set up in 1886, designated 1% of government revenue for mission use (Durack 1969:294). Governments had the power to open and close missions. Missionaries were required to submit annual reports to the Colonial government to establish the

"success" of their missions in order to continue receiving financial aid. The Colonial Executive Council established the criteria for measuring "success" according to their Christianising and civilising programme. If missionaries could demonstrate "improvements" in the minds and habits of the Aborigines, they could continue for another year (Woolmington 1973:98,99).

Missionaries acted as government officials and government agents. Appointed as Protectors of Aborigines, they dispensed government services and were given coercive power over Aborigines (Bardon 1949:93). During Rev. Gribble's sixteen years in East Kimberley, he held the positions of Justice of the Peace, Member of the Licensing Bench, Protector of Aborigines, and Official Visitor to the Wyndham Gaol (Gribble 1930:227). Rev. Hagenauer of the Ramahyuck mission in Victoria, holding the offices of Secretary of the Aborigines' Protection Board and General Inspector of Aborigines, was one of the chief authors of the Aborigines' Protection Act dispersion policy of 1886 that defined Aborigines of mixed descent as whites and removed them from the Victorian missions (Atkinson 1981:78).

By 1862, missions in the southern regions of Australia had been established by the LMS, CMS and WMS, the Lutheran Societies of Dresden and Berlin, the Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church and Moravian Church (Gribble 1930:4). Almost all had been declared failures and were closed by the Colonial governments. By 1865 the churches in Australia, despairing of their failures in southern Australia, began looking to the north to what they saw as a pristine "mission field".

In 1865 the Heathen Missions Committee (comprised of Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches) was established, and in the next few decades as a result of collaboration between the Australian governments and the Heathen Missions Committee, large areas of Cape York Peninsula, Arnhem Land and north Western Australia were declared to be Aboriginal reserves controlled by governments and managed by missions (Boland 1980:14; White 1951:175).

The Catholic Church entered Western Australia in 1846 with the arrival of Bishop John Brady and his missionary retinue from Spain, France and Ireland. Brady divided the colony into three zones and despatched missionaries into each region (O'Kelly 1972:29). By the 1880s, after initial failures, the French Trappist Order and later the German Pallottine Pious Society of Missions succeeded in implanting the Catholic Church in the north (Durack 1969:35-273). By 1960, the Pallottine establishments at Broome, Derby, Beagle Bay, Lombadina, Balgo Hills and La Grange had created an effective Catholic hegemony over the Pilbara and Kimberley regions.

Kimberley history

Christianity and pastoralism arrived in the Kimberley around the same time. The earliest Catholic missions of the 1880s were established along the coastline (Durack 1969:35-79,109). In 1885-86 a short-lived gold rush attracted Europeans inland, creating the town of Halls Creek and stimulating pastoral expansion along the river systems into East Kimberley. Massacres of the river-ranges people (Bunaba, Gija, West Jaru and Miriwung speakers) followed these incursions, the majority

carried out between 1888 and 1894 (Clement 1987:8,16,17; Ross 1989:25-27).

Aboriginal resistance to white colonisation was reported from 1887 to about the First World War (Biskup 1973:32; Ross 1987:13). This took the form of surprise attacks on pastoral stations, mission stations and gold mining leases. Drovers' teams were frequently ambushed on the Halls Creek - Wyndham track. Aborigines speared cattle and chased them from waterholes, driving them on to marshy ground where they were left maimed and trapped (Sullivan 1989:89-93). Massacres continued to be recorded into the late 1920s: at Mistake Creek (1915), Bedford Downs (?1924) and Forrest River (1926). (Clement 1987:28, 29; Ross 1989:39, 42; Ross and Bray 1989:73, 74).⁹ By 1896 Aboriginal survivors had become the subjects of government regulation. The newly established Aborigines' Protection Board began discussions to remove indigent Aborigines from pastoral and town "fringe areas" to government reserves and feeding depots.¹⁰

Moola Bulla was established as a government reserve/cattle station in 1910 (and Violet Valley north of Halls Creek became a feeding depot in 1912) to prevent cattle depredation on the surrounding stations and to "quieten down" the remnant Aboriginal populations (Clement 1987:18-20, 32-34; Rumley and Touissant 1990:9,11). In 1929 a school for "native and half-caste" children was commenced on the reserve by the storekeeper's wife, and Moola Bulla began to develop an

⁹ According to McAdam, a man of Gija descent, "the Gija recall twelve mass killings in their country, at least two of which occurred in the 1930s" (McAdam 1995:43).

¹⁰ It was not until 1927 that a *Royal Commission to Inquire into Alleged Killing and Burning of Bodies of Aborigines in the East Kimberley* was held, and its effects were negligible. The *Native Administration Act 1936 (WA)* made only minor changes to the previous legislative regime and did not halt punitive practices against Aborigines (Pierluigi 1991:25).

institutional character. Children were sent to the government settlement from outlying cattle stations, and dormitories were built in 1941. "Full-bloods" and "half-castes" began to be distinguished in terms of their education, accommodation and employment opportunities at Moola Bulla and on the surrounding stations. This was also reflected in official government policy. Compulsory removal of "half-caste" children to Moola Bulla began in the late 1930s (Rumley and Touissant 1990:20).

Neville, the Commissioner of Native Affairs in Western Australia, decided at this time that the Moola Bulla children needed "moral and spiritual training" to complement their secular education. He arranged with the Presbyterian Board of Missions to have a missionary in residence at Moola Bulla, and in 1939 the Rev. and Mrs Hovenden arrived to take up their spiritual and educational duties (Rumley and Touissant 1990:21).

After the First World War, pastoral properties were being established by ex-servicemen in the arid regions south of Halls Creek (Bolton 1953:194,195). The Catholic church entered the East Kimberley in 1934 to establish a frontier mission on the periphery of the river-ranges country to absorb the desert people who were moving north. Rockhole Station was purchased for this purpose, but the experiment lasted only five years. In 1939 they relocated to Balgo Hills in the desert people's territory (Berndt and Berndt 1960; Durack 1969:243-245). Catholic priests from Rockhole and Balgo missions also visited the cattle stations, especially those in the far east of the Kimberley near the Northern Territory border (East Jaru speakers) and in the desert areas

south of Halls Creek (Walmajarri, Wangkajunga and Gugaja speakers).

United Aborigines Mission (UAM)¹¹ missionaries based in Derby from the 1940s began itinerant work in the East Kimberley around this time. They visited Halls Creek, Moola Bulla government settlement and the surrounding cattle stations (Gija, Guniyan and West Jaru country).

Moola Bulla was closed in 1955 because the Department of Native Welfare wished to relinquish responsibility for administering pastoral and agricultural properties in Western Australia. No provision was made for the 250 Aboriginal inhabitants of Moola Bulla who were evicted by the new pastoral lessees (Rumley and Touissant 1990:30,32). After they had been unceremoniously dumped in Halls Creek Shire Park in the centre of town amongst white townspeople who did not want them, the Fitzroy Crossing UAM Mission agreed to take them. The Moola Bulla people were trucked 300 kms to Fitzroy Crossing (in Bunaba country).

Gija and West Jaru people stayed at Fitzroy Crossing for only a short time. Many found work on surrounding stations and others made their way back to their own country settling on the fringes of Halls Creek. The government was forced to establish two reserves outside the township to accommodate them (Bolger 1987:3). Despite the

¹¹ The United Aborigines Mission (UAM) and its sister mission, The Aborigines Inland Mission (AIM) sprang from the same roots at La Perouse, NSW at the turn of the 20th century. The two missionary societies were initially supported by the Baptist, Methodist and Congregational churches, but the liberalising Methodists and Congregationalists withdrew in the 1940s, leaving the societies as fundamentalist organisations supported mainly by Baptist, Church of Christ and Brethren churches. The UAM services Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales, and the AIM works in the Northern Territory, Queensland and New South Wales.

brevity of their stay at Fitzroy Crossing Mission (the children stayed much longer because they remained in the school and dormitories while their parents worked on cattle stations), the UAM came to be seen by Gija and West Jaru people as a safe haven. The first Christian conversions of Moola Bulla/Halls Creek people were recorded at the Fitzroy Crossing Mission.

As Kolig (1988:376) has observed, by the mid 1970s, the first wave of evangelical missionary expansion into the East Kimberley appeared to have run its course. Conversions to Christianity were rare events,¹² and the UAM had settled down into a fairly sedate old people's church. In Halls Creek, the UAM adherents were in the main townspeople, that is, people who in the 1950s had expressed willingness to deny their Aboriginality and live like white people in order to gain reasonable housing and education for their children. Almost all of these people were mixed descent Aborigines. They were allocated five acre blocks within the town boundaries in order to grow vegetables and become relatively self-sufficient. The UAM church was built next to these blocks in 1957. In response to the increasing UAM presence in the East Kimberley, Catholic priests were stationed in Wyndham and Halls Creek in 1962 (Durack 1969:280).

However, in the late 1970s a second wave of evangelical missionary endeavour (of Pentecostal Christianity) entered the Kimberley. The modern (American) Pentecostal movement, which emerged at the turn of the 20th century, traces its heritage back to the European Pentecostal movements of the 18th century and ultimately to the

¹² See Chapter 5 for a discussion of conversion in the evangelical Christian tradition.

“original” Biblical Pentecostal movement recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

In Europe, reform movements such as High Anglican pietism and Calvinist Puritanism produced in the English Religious Societies, and the German mystical pietism of Bohemia and Moravia were ignited in the person of John Wesley to produce the 18th Evangelical Revival. For Wesley, salvation by Christ alone (by his once-and-for-all blood sacrifice) failed to provide ongoing personal soteriological security. He desired a subjective state of sinlessness and sought additional experiences of grace which he termed “second blessings”. In 1739 in England an assembled company of Moravian Brethren and Oxford Pietists experienced a Pentecostal movement which ushered in the great Evangelical Revival (Wood 1981:146).

Later, during the 19th century American revival, Wesley’s “second blessing” became “the baptism of the Holy Spirit”. This amendment was made by the Methodist minister, Charles Parham, and it was the preaching of his student, William Seymour, which sparked the 1906 “Azusa Street Revival” which marks the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement. This movement spread rapidly around the world (Barr 1984:161).

The Assemblies of God (AOG) is a union of independent Pentecostal assemblies which trace their origins to the American Pentecostal Revival of 1906. The AOG was established around 1916 in America (Roxborough 1987:5) and 1924 in Britain (Carter 1979). There is no centralised government. Each assembly maintains its autonomy, but a Constitution and a Statement of Fundamental Truths unites them

doctrinally and administratively. The AOG was formed in Australia in 1937 (Smith 1987:10).

In Western societies the Pentecostal churches which had their first flush of vitality at the turn of the century appeared to have reached "a plateau of growth" by the 1950s. But experiential forms of Christianity became more important in the mid to late 1960s, with young people especially moving en masse out of sedate denominations into the Pentecostal churches. William Menzies, an AOG historian, observed in 1971 "evidence of a fresh vitality and a renewed sense of direction [in the AOG churches] which give bright promise of continued spiritual revival and evangelistic outreach in the years that lie ahead" (Menzies 1971:12, cited in Poloma 1989:xvi). By the 1980s, the AOG denomination had become one of the fastest-growing Christian organisations in the world.

In 1979 the AOG established a mission church in Kununurra, at the time a fast-growing Kimberley town developing at the site of the Ord River Irrigation Project. The AOG arrived in Halls Creek in 1982 at a time when the UAM church was experiencing a leadership crisis. A younger generation of UAM missionaries had become involved with Pentecostal practices and introduced these into the Halls Creek church in 1978. The anti-Pentecostal UAM Council in Perth, after five years of indecision, told them to go. Five families (the European leadership and a number of Aboriginal followers) left Halls Creek for the Blue Mountains in New South Wales leaving the UAM mission in considerable disarray.

UAM adherents who had accepted Pentecostal teachings transferred to the new AOG church at their departing leaderships' bidding. However, there was now another large population of Aboriginal people living in Halls Creek. They were station people who had been moving into town over a twenty year period as a result of economic and technological changes in the pastoral industry. They lived in the two reserves located outside the town boundaries and had not assimilated to the UAM during the first wave of missionary endeavour.

The twenty year history of the Halls Creek reserve people had been one of continual disappointment and frustration, and a growing dependence on welfare and alcohol. When the Commonwealth government took over Aboriginal affairs, the reserve people were encouraged by the Department of Community Welfare to obtain land, set up communities and develop a degree of independence. From the late 1960s to the late 1970s the Gija people made several attempts to purchase pastoral stations on Gija territory and when that was unsuccessful, to have a small piece of land excised from Moola Bulla Station, their old home, for living space. These attempts were thwarted by the Western Australian government (Bolger 1987:3,4).

By the time of the AOG 's arrival in Halls Creek in 1982, the reserve people had lost faith in government action (Bolger 1987:4). The old people who had maintained traditional ceremonial activities despite UAM disapproval and who provided a sense of leadership and continuity with a more cohesive past were dying. The felt situation was one of abandonment and loss:

When Bro. Phillip first came to this place he got all those people that nobody wanted to own. They were nobody's people. They were big drunkards down the creek... Bro. Phillip used to go up and down the creek everywhere, get all the people. They was for nobody really, those people he's got. (EN)

Theologies and missiologies of the churches

The UAM missionaries arrived in the East Kimberley at about the same time that Protestant churches in Westernised countries were dividing into liberal and fundamentalist camps. By the last quarter of the 19th century new geological and biological theories and German theological criticism were successfully challenging the cosmocentric claims of orthodox Christianity. British and American theologians began seeking ways to adapt Christianity to the emerging narratives of contemporary science (Ammerman 1991:2).

In the first two decades of the 20th century there was a strong fundamentalist reaction to this liberalising trend. Fundamentalists in America entered the political arena to try and prevent evolutionary science being taught in schools. They were unsuccessful and in the 1930s fundamentalists separated from the mainstream churches to found new, conservative denominations (Ammerman 1991:2, 29). It was at this time that the liberalising Methodist and Congregationalist churches in Australia withdrew from the UAM, leaving it as a fundamentalist organisation committed to hierarchical and dualistic theological (and sociological) values: to Scriptural inerrancy, Baconian faith in human mastery over the natural world, patriarchal family structures, salvation of individual souls and a premillennial Apocalypse.

Earlier UAM missionaries' views of Aboriginal religion-culture

Lothar Daly¹³ was save them from all the thing what they gotta ... corroboree and everything. Daly never like that corroboree because corroboree for the Devil. That's why God never like the corroboree. (MJ)¹⁴

The earliest UAM missionaries to the East Kimberley (in the mid 1940s) came with 19th century evangelical attitudes and views. Christianity and European civilisation were seen as coterminous and degeneration theories were used to account for the existence of hunter-gatherer peoples in Australia. Aboriginal religion and culture was interpreted as the work of the Devil, and traditional ceremonial activities were strictly forbidden on mission grounds.

The missionaries frequently exhibited a "My God is stronger than your god" approach to Aboriginal beliefs and practices. At the Fitzroy Crossing Mission Mr Abel¹⁵ persuaded a *mabarn* healer to burn his "fetishes". This demonstration of God's power did not have the desired effect, however, as later Aboriginal accounts of this incident reveal.¹⁶ The missionaries also forbade the use of Aboriginal musical instruments in church services.

¹³ A first generation (itinerant) UAM missionary based initially in Derby (in the 1940s) and later at Fitzroy Crossing Mission (established in 1952).

¹⁴ Maddy Jarra, an AOG adherent. See Chapter 4.

¹⁵ A first generation itinerant missionary based initially at Fitzroy Crossing Mission. In 1957 he became the first pastor of the Halls Creek (UAM) People's Church.

¹⁶ According to Aboriginal people (in both UAM and AOG churches), it would have been all right if Niari had just left his *daragu*, and gone over to the Lord's side. Burning them (or harming them in any way) was the mistake. As a result, Niari's brother sickened and died. The missionary also sickened and would have died, but was saved by Christian prayer for healing.

Present day UAM missionaries are critical of many of these earlier views, particularly with the tendency to equate Christianity with European culture, and to see all of Aboriginal religion-culture as emanating from the Devil. Present day missionaries wish there could be more Aboriginal cultural content in their church services, that digeridoos and boomerang clapsticks could be introduced along with Aboriginal languages in singing, and that more of the Dreamtime stories were known.

However, some of these 19th century missionary views have persisted into the 1990s. Despite a changing secular consciousness which repudiates earlier views of European superiority, UAM theology is still fundamentalist, espousing Biblical inerrancy and requiring literal interpretations of Biblical texts. Present day UAM missionaries still espouse post-diluvian dispersion and degeneration theories to account for the existence of traditional Aboriginal beliefs and practices:

At the Tower of Babel after the great Flood a diversity of languages and cultures developed. Originally there may have been elements of truth in these cultures but through oral transmission of stories, this truth may have been lost.
(Pastor John, UAM)

Present day UAM missionaries' views of Aboriginal religion-culture

It is universally agreed by present day UAM missionaries that traditional Aboriginal religions are religions of fear.¹⁷ This fear is particularly evident whenever Aboriginal people come into direct contact with the spirit world, that is, at night, at times of death, and

¹⁷ The youngest generation of UAM missionaries, though willing to concede that there are some good things in Aboriginal culture, continue to assert that Aboriginal religions are religions of fear.

during traditional religious ceremonies. The source of this fear is Satan, who has taken control of Aboriginal spirit worlds.

Satan frequently poses as Aboriginal spirits of the dead. In this guise he infiltrates traditional religious ceremonies, involving people in spirit dances and other forms of enchantment. "Sacred sites" are under the control of Satan, who uses them as just another method of inducing fear. Satan is particularly active during the law season when vast areas of the Kimberley fall under his spell. Christian families are not automatically immune from this onslaught. Children from Christian families can be abducted by lawmen and forced into initiation camps. People need special protection from God at this time.

However, for this younger generation of UAM missionaries, categorising all indigenous cultural practices as "Satan worship" is an extreme and unnecessary view. Some cultural and religious practices have clearly been influenced by Satan. These include payback killing, the practice of "black magic", healing by "witchcraft", and religious ceremonies which involve the invocation of evil spirits, drinking blood and sexual promiscuity. However, an Aboriginal hunting and gathering economy, practices of sharing, traditional marriage regulations, traditional languages, musical instruments and some art and craft work is good, and should be encouraged, even today.

Other Aboriginal rituals such as rainmaking rituals and smoking ceremonies, while perhaps not Satanic in origin, nevertheless usurp God's sovereignty by claiming efficacy from their performance alone. An Aboriginal smoking ceremony performed at the inauguration of the 1991 World Council of Churches Conference in Canberra, and

telecast around Australia, shocked the UAM missionaries in Halls Creek. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse the human soul. Substituting non-Christian rites for Jesus' salvific death on the cross strikes at the very heart of the Christian gospel.

Humans, who have a God-given faculty for worship, continually seek an object worthy of their praise and adoration. For many peoples who have become ignorant of the true God, this ability to worship has been deflected from the Creator to the created. Although nature itself bears witness to the existence of an eternal Creator God, many cultures such as the Australian Aboriginal have worshipped trees, rocks and animals.

The "traditional" emotions of jealousy, anger and grief-revenge that are exhibited by Aboriginal people, and are so disruptive of Christian fellowship, are sinful and an indication of spiritual immaturity. When Christians have matured in Christ and developed the fruits of the Spirit, of peace, joy, gentleness, longsuffering and kindness, such emotions will no longer have any place in their lives.

For the European pastor, jealousy and anger are the biggest problems in his church. UAM Christians have, in the main, discarded traditional religious ceremonies, sorcery and love spells, but the emotions which underlie these activities have persisted, leading to non-forgiveness, grudge-holding and family feuds which have not been eradicated from the UAM church.

A developing UAM missiology

I think there's a middle line that you need to take ... there are many good things in the Aboriginal law that are acceptable. But some of the things in their law have been directed by Satan. I could never say that the Dreamtime in total comes from God. (JS)¹⁸

Present day UAM missionaries talk about taking a middle line between the fairly extreme anti-cultural stance of the early UAM missionaries (and the present day AOG missionaries) and the current "fulfilment missiologies" of the liberal churches in Arnhem Land.

A fulfilment missiology which claims that other religions have the same status as the Old Testament in relation to Christianity, that is, they are a preparation for the gospel, and should not be abolished but rather fulfilled in Christ, is not acceptable to UAM missionaries. This missiology goes against the fundamentalist claims that only the Bible (comprised of the Old and New Testaments) is the inspired Word of God. Also, other cultures cannot claim the same status as Hebrew religion-culture because the Jews were God's chosen people. They will always have a unique status in Judaeo-Christian beliefs. People who claim that Aboriginal law and Old Testament law are equal in status are diluting Christian doctrine and weakening God's message to the world.

However, while other religions cannot provide access to God, there being only one way to God, through Jesus Christ, they may point to God. After the post-diluvian dispersion, many elements of truth disappeared from human traditions because of oral transmission of

¹⁸ Jenny Summers, an ex-UAM missionary living in Halls Creek.

stories. However, there are still signposts in the world's cultures and religions pointing to a knowledge of the true God. The missionary task is to find the keys within other traditions which can open people's consciousness to the Way, the Truth and the Life. In this sense, Jesus is the fulfilment of these signs.

The UAM missionaries refer to the "Peace Child" model of missionary evangelisation which has become popular with a younger generation of conservative evangelical missionaries. The model was distilled from a successful missionary enterprise in Irian Jaya (see Richardson 1974). Bible translators were unable to reach the tribespeople with God's message until an incident occurred which provided an opening for the reception of the gospel. The warring tribes had introduced a practice to halt their continuous and destructive feuding. A newborn child from one tribe was given as a "peace offering" to the enemy tribe. As long as the child lived, there would be peace between the tribes. The missionaries found in this practice an analogy with God's salvific offering of Jesus Christ as a "peace child" to reconcile the world to himself. This "peace offering" was the key which opened the people's understanding to the gospel of Christ.

The "Peace Child" model of evangelisation requires acknowledgement that there is good as well as bad in Aboriginal religion-culture. God as well as Satan may have been influencing Aboriginal religions traditionally. God may have been preparing people's hearts and minds in advance of missionisation to receive the gospel. For this reason, present day UAM missionaries are interested in collecting Dreamtime stories in order to find the signposts pointing to the Christian God. They regret the loss of knowledge of Dreamtime stories amongst the

Aboriginal townspeople who attend the UAM church. A Dreamtime story of a Kingfisher who provided water in the desert was felt to have sufficient parallels with the Old Testament Moses story to be able to be used as a story which points to Christ, the true and living (spiritual) water of the New Testament.¹⁹

The standard by which UAM missionaries evaluate Aboriginal religious and cultural practices is whether they glorify (or can be used to glorify) God. If a practice glorifies God by being properly subordinate to him and/or by adhering to Biblical principles, it is acceptable. If it celebrates a power outside of God or a practice that is unbiblical, it cannot be glorifying to him and should be discarded. However, for younger UAM missionaries, Aboriginal Christians (not Europeans) should be the final arbiters of what is right and wrong in their religion-culture. Europeans know what parts of their own culture they should keep or discard, but they don't have adequate insight into Aboriginal culture.

This new, relatively open stance towards Aboriginal religions and cultural practices by UAM missionaries leaves considerable space for local contestation and negotiation. It also leaves missionaries open to dilemmas which did not exist in an earlier, more certain, missionary period. For example, in the past ancestral snakes were equated with the Biblical serpent and were therefore seen by missionaries (and some

¹⁹ Furlong (1996) quoting from unpublished work by Sister Adele Howard of Balgo Mission, gives a version of the desert Kingfisher story:

The people were thirsty, travelling north, down to the creek, where the tree was. The Kingfisher, he led them, he was ahead of them, the old man. He had a dog. The people were thirsty, dying. He brought the water to them in a stick in his beak from the place where the creek was. The Kingfisher brought them to the creek and settled them down there. Each time a person died, a tree grew. These trees are sacred, they are people. (Gracie Green, quoted in Furlong 1996:86)

Aboriginal adherents) as unambiguously evil despite a large local knowledge to the contrary. Today, the status of ancestral snakes is being reviewed in the context of contemporary Aboriginal art and craft work (see Chapter 7).

Present day AOG missionaries' views of Aboriginal religion-culture

The [Halls Creek] Aborigines are in a spiritual wilderness. Ancestral worship, animistic beliefs, sadistic rituals and other demonic inspired practices, continue still today ... Their system of belief produces fear, torment, oppression and in some cases, death. (Hills 1990:10)

AOG missionaries make a strong demarcation between what they see as the "old law" or "old way" (traditional Aboriginal religious practices) and the "new way" (Christianity). There is no continuity between these two perspectives (and there must be no admixture of them in indigenous Christian practice). The "old law" (*in toto*) derives from Satan. The "new way", foretold in the Old Testament, was inaugurated by Christ's salvific death on the cross.

Satan's role in traditional Aboriginal religion is absolute. Any site of traditional Aboriginal activity whether it be law, culture, language, music or art and craft²⁰ is a site of devils and demons. "Sacred sites", Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre premises, Kimberley Language Centre premises, Aboriginal art and craft premises, Kimberley Land Council premises, remote communities which are traditional in orientation are all places which harbour the powers of darkness and evil.

²⁰ These categories, imposed on Aboriginal practices by Europeans, are today used by Aboriginal people in the Kimberley.

According to AOG missionaries (and some Aboriginal adherents), Satan stands guard over the entrance to Red Hill, an Aboriginal community close to Halls Creek which affiliates with the Catholic church and which continues to promote traditional religious activity. Satan is frequently seen there in the guise of a lion-shaped cloud with a wide open mouth ("seeking whom he may devour"). Jesus stands above the cloud but is unable to enter the community. Continuing prayer warfare is needed to wrest Red Hill from Satan's grasp and allow Christ to enter.

No.2 Reserve, one of the two reserves allocated to Aboriginal people after the closure of Moola Bulla government station, is described by missionaries as having been a dancing place for Satan. People who attend traditional ceremonies, particularly after they have experienced God's forgiveness and healing, are laying themselves open to demon possession and affliction by strange diseases.

Dreamtime stories are not true for AOG missionaries because they are not found in the Bible. Therefore they have no place in the church or in Christian life generally. (Aboriginal adherents of the AOG do not necessarily share this view.²¹) All representations of serpents in all

²¹ According to Maddy Jarra, an AOG adherent, the Dreaming stories about the Sun and Moon are true:

God made the Sun and Moon. He likes them. Must be same story. You look in the Bible. You might find all those stories (i.e. the Dreaming stories about Walurr (Sun) and Jagiliny (Moon). (MJ)

I followed Maddy's advice and looked in the Bible (with the help of Hebrew and ancient Near Eastern specialists) and found some interesting fragments. The astral bodies were major deities in the Ugaritic pantheon. They were the offspring of the sacred marriage between El and Asherah. The morning and evening stars were the first-born of all the stars and planets (Wyatt 1994:402-404). The celestial bodies were the sons of El, the heavenly court, the *bene ha-elohim* (Day 1994:46). The king of the gods (El) was the rising sun whose dawn theophany eclipsed all the heavenly luminaries.

cultures symbolise Satan, regardless of context. Ancestral snakes therefore are seen as unambiguously evil by AOG missionaries. Representations of snakes in works of art or in any other form are not permitted in AOG households or meeting places.

Like the UAM leadership, AOG missionaries regard a number of traditional Aboriginal practices as sinful and to be eradicated from Aboriginal Christian life. All traditional rituals are equated with "witchcraft". Payback killing and other manifestations of a reciprocity ethic are believed to be Satanic in origin. Aboriginal embeddedness in an indigenous exchange system that is attached to yet operates independently of the European market economy is particularly distressing to the AOG leadership because it is seen to draw both time and money away from church activities and goals.

AOG missiology

The AOG leadership in Halls Creek operates with a missiology of radical discontinuity (that is, discontinuity between Christianity and Aboriginal beliefs and practices). The idiom of the old and the new adopted by AOG missionaries as a basic strategy for doing missions, has a long history in Judaeo-Christianity. The Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah, made a sharp distinction between the old and the new at a time when the Israelites were being forcibly moved from a kin-based to a city-state polity and morality. The recategorising of the Hebrew

Yahweh, on his elevation to the position of Israelite state deity, appropriated from El his solar cult, his wife and his heavenly court (Day 1994:38-46; Taylor 1993:131). Solar Yahwism was an important component of Jerusalemite theology throughout the period of the monarchy (Taylor 1993:132). Later monotheistic editors did not manage to eliminate all references to the worship of sun, moon and stars from the Hebrew Bible (see Deuteronomy 4:19-20, 32:8-9; Ezekiel 8).

Bible as the Christian Old Testament which contrasts sharply with the morality and values of the New Testament legitimises and provides a language for Christian fundamentalist denigration of other traditions. The "old" as a category of practices which needs to be abandoned has been extended by AOG missionaries to include not only Judaism and non-Christian religions generally but also older Christian denominations and forms of worship. (This attitude has created conflict between the UAM and the AOG churches in Halls Creek. See next section in this chapter).²²

Like an earlier generation of UAM missionaries to the East Kimberley, the current AOG leadership exhibits 19th century missionary attitudes towards other religions. A "My God is stronger than your god" approach is frequently used when conducting "outreach services" in Aboriginal communities which are traditional in orientation. However, these methods no longer have the effect they may have had in a colonial past when both missions and governments were the masters of a subordinated indigenous people.

Today, Aboriginal people in outlying communities have (or are seeking) land tenure, recognition of their languages and cultures in educational, legal and other European systems, and financial and moral support from government-funded Aboriginal organisations. At Yaruman Bro. Phillip broke a boomerang during an outreach service to the East Jaru people as a demonstration of God's superior power. The people's response was to ban the AOG from Yaruman. Later they

²² Aboriginal people are no strangers to the idiom of the "old" and the "new" in matters of religious practice. Kolig (1981:158) talks of religious cults and ideologies being transmitted over great distances with astonishing rapidity in the 1960s and 1970s. Direction and focus of transmission were subject to swift changes.

invited the Catholic church to run the school and provide a Catholic presence in the community.

The more "traditional" people in Halls Creek and surrounding areas are seen by white townspeople, including the European missionaries, as children. In particular, they are said to exhibit a child's lack of internal discipline and therefore require external discipline in matters relating to the Christian life until they show signs of spiritual maturity. (This evaluation of Aboriginal maturity was made by an ex-school teacher missionary who no doubt had applied this method to his school children.)

As AOG adherents are seen by the Protestant missionaries to be more "traditional" and less spiritually mature than UAM adherents, it is accepted that they will require external discipline. In AOG circles this discipline takes the form of close surveillance and control over Aboriginal people's daily lives. This form of control closely resembles government control over Aboriginal lives in an earlier era, legitimised by the Aboriginal Protection Acts of 1886-1963. This is recognised by older Aboriginal people, some of whom complain that they have been through "government times" already and do not wish to repeat the experience.

AOG adherents are required to ask permission to leave Halls Creek and be absent from church services. AOG missionaries actively discourage their adherents from going on bush trips, regardless of the purpose, unless it is with an organised church group. Countryside, that is, the space between European townships (seen as places of European civil order and Christian morality), is perceived by AOG

missionaries as a place of evil and temptation from which the spiritually immature must be protected. Neither Christianity nor European civilisation has been able to extend its control over the countryside as it has over the townships. The countryside is a place where traditional powers (that is, the Devil and his demons in traditional guise) have not relinquished their control.²³ Jesus' blood does not flow through the land.²⁴

The AOG attempts to act as a gate-keeper to its flock for all incoming knowledge about the world. This knowledge is filtered through an AOG prism and presented to Aboriginal adherents in a peculiarly AOG guise. Messages about the outside world are often presented in the context of sermons, interlaced with Biblical prophecies and denunciations. The January 1991 Gulf War was interpreted by the AOG missionaries as a sign pointing to the End of the World. "Wars and rumours of wars" were frequently discussed and analysed in AOG circles in 1991.

The voice of this world, including radio, TV and the newspapers, is the voice of Satan. (Bro. Phillip, AOG pastor)

²³ Sullivan (1989:116) states that in both European Australian and Aboriginal cultures, a strict divide between town and countryside has been constructed, although the meanings attached to these two places are almost diametrically opposite. Aborigines consider themselves to be "at home" in the countryside and in alien territory in the towns. They see themselves "not as protected from, but situated within, the Australian bush... it is in the towns that most feel themselves to be on foreign ground, regardless of how familiar this foreign territory can become". This is also my experience of Aboriginal situatedness in the Kimberley, and is the reason for their continued push for land rights, despite church opposition.

²⁴ There are many places in the Kimberley where Jesus' blood does not flow (these are the places where devils and demons are believed to be in control), for example, the countryside, any site of traditional Aboriginal activity (e.g. sacred sites, remote communities which are traditional in orientation, Aboriginal organisations which promote traditional cultural values) and sites of nonchristian European activity such as disco dances and football games.

Access to unfiltered knowledge is severely restricted by the AOG leadership. Aboriginal adherents are told not to watch television. They are also told not to associate with people (including relatives) who are not AOG members. The AOG missionaries preach a literal separation from the world. For example, the ideal Christian woman is one who, when not attending church or witnessing to others, is sitting quietly in her home, with open Bible, listening to recorded Christian music or sermons, and attending to her family's material and spiritual needs.

Conflicts between UAM and AOG churches today

Although UAM and AOG missionaries hold many theological and missiological views in common as a result of their literalist interpretations of the Bible, there are also conflicts which divide them. The AOG in particular, as an aggressive and expansionist missionary force, emphasizes the differences rather than the commonalties between the two churches.

Theological differences are largely the result of Pentecostal (AOG) versus non-Pentecostal (UAM) interpretations of Biblical texts. The AOG church sees itself as energetic and progressive, keeping up with Holy Spirit initiatives in the world while the UAM, old and worn out and lacking the will to change, has become irrelevant to the spiritual aspirations of humanity in the late 20th century.

Differences in missiology are a result of the present day UAM leadership modifying the 19th century views of earlier missionaries in line with an emerging post-industrialist and post-colonialist concern for the earth's resources and indigenous ways of life. In this case the

UAM sees itself as progressive in relation to the AOG, while remaining faithful to the Biblical vision of humanity.

God's character: Although the AOG is thoroughly Pauline-New Testament in its appropriation of post-resurrection power, its God is the Old Testament God of the post-exilic prophets. He is a just and righteous God who demands righteousness of his people, whose anger and wrath is ready to consume those who fail to meet his standards. The fear of God is strongly emphasized in AOG evangelising methods:

I'm not trying to frighten people into the Kingdom. God is. God uses fear. God is not gentle Jesus, meek and mild. He is the judge of all humanity. God's wrath, anger and indignation are a thousand times more than Satan can put out. (Bro. Phillip, AOG pastor).

The UAM, on the other hand, emphasizes the New Testament God of love, as revealed in the life and death of Jesus, and finds love to be a factor lacking in AOG teaching and practice.

Dualism: The AOG espouses a radical dualism that is gnostic in its intensity.²⁵ There are two spiritual kingdoms: the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. The material world in which Christians find themselves is under the control of Satan and beyond redemption. God's people are to be saved out of this world. The AOG, however, does not share the deep pessimism of gnostic spirituality. It is world-hating but it does not seek only to escape the world. Christians are in

²⁵ Gnosticism, a hellenistic religious movement which predated (and influenced) Christianity, taught that there was an ontological chasm between the upper and lower worlds. The material world, which was unambiguously evil, was not God's creation. Material creation was an error - it should never have occurred. Human beings yearned for incorporeality and spiritual reunion with their celestial home far away from earthly existence (Collins 1995:100).

battle with Satan. Their task as prayer warriors is an offensive one: to storm the forts of darkness and pluck precious souls from the very gates of hell. For this purpose, Holy Spirit power is needed.

Although the UAM is also very conscious of evil forces in the world, it espouses a modified dualism. While there are two spiritual kingdoms vying for souls, and although at times the whole situation may appear grim indeed, ultimately God is in control. The victory has already been won in the spiritual realm. Christians are to resist Satan in the name of Christ, who is victor, and Satan will flee from them.

Holiness: Holiness, an important concept in AOG teaching, is equated with a radical separation from the world. "Touch no unclean thing" (Haggai 7:5) is a frequent AOG admonition. Old Testament post-exilic texts admonishing religious and cultural separation of the returning exiles from the peoples who now inhabited Palestine, are appropriated by the AOG leadership to counsel their flock. The AOG adherents are admonished not only to separate from all non-Christian activity, but to separate from non-Pentecostal people, places and events.

The UAM, in correcting this teaching, points to the New Testament incident where God reveals to Peter in a dream that Old Testament laws are not sufficient for New Testament living:

You know that a Jew is not allowed by his religion to visit or associate with Gentiles. But God has shown me that I must not consider any person unclean or defiled. (Acts 10:28).

For the UAM, Christians are not called to retreat from the world into private cocoons, but to emerge like butterflies into the world to transform their environment.

The Holy Spirit: According to AOG missionaries, Pentecostal Christians when gathered together in worship should flow with the Holy Spirit. This flow is evidenced by a cascading torrent of words pouring out of their mouths. If a particularly strong bolt of Holy Spirit power passes through one's body, one cannot resist it but will fall to the ground. It is the Christians' task to get the Holy Spirit moving in church services. Prayer meetings are held before all services to bind Satan's power and allow the Spirit to flow freely. The Pentecostal Christian is not filled with the Holy Spirit once only for all time. Christians need continual refilling and re-empowerment to equip them for their task of spiritual warfare.

These basically agricultural ideas about energy flow²⁶ which were lost from Western discourse after mechanical ideas about flow became predominant, are now re-entering Western world views, often from black sources (see Chapter 6). The UAM, on the other hand, teaches that all Christians receive a portion of the Holy Spirit at conversion, and that continual refilling is unscriptural. Rather, one needs to continually submit oneself to the promptings and initiatives of the Holy Spirit.

Healing: Human sickness, for AOG missionaries, has spiritual roots. Satan, whose malignant power has infiltrated God's creation to cause

²⁶ That is, life energies flow naturally according to season, and tend to flow where they will rather than being forcibly directed into artificial channels by mechanical means.

corruption, disease and decay, is the source of sickness and pain in the world. When engaged in the ministry of healing, Christians must bind the power of Satan, so that the healing power of Christ can flow unimpeded. AOG healing sessions display loudness and aggression, needed to battle the forces of evil and penetrate to the Kingdom of God. God himself is presented not with a humble petition, but with a demand to heal the sick person.

The UAM missionaries have found it necessary to correct AOG teachings on healing. Christians cannot make demands of God (who is the heavenly King), but can place their requests before him. God will listen to people's prayers, and answer them according to his will, if they are obedient to him. Although God is a loving heavenly Father who desires the best for his children, his rule is paternalistic. Christian spirituality is not egalitarian and democratic, but hierarchical.

The Catholic church in relation to the UAM and AOG

The Catholic church in the Kimberley while conservative in comparison with other Australian Catholic dioceses, and slow to implement the Vatican II re-evaluations of other religions,²⁷ nevertheless shows a degree of tolerance and respect for Aboriginal religious and cultural traditions which has not been possible for the

²⁷ The Vatican Council II (1962-65) put forward the proposition that there is both revelation *and* salvation (or the opportunity to seek salvation) in non-Christian religions:

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience... Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapter 2, No. 16, cited in Hick 1973:125).

UAM or AOG. This is related to the Catholic missionary programme of evangelising cultures rather than individuals.

The use of indigenous languages and musical instruments in church liturgy, acceptance of traditional rituals which are considered by the evangelical Protestant churches to be anti-Christian (for example, initiation ceremonies), and the acknowledged co-existence of Aboriginal and Western Christian ideas about spiritual existence are part of Catholic practice in the Kimberley. These concessions to indigenous ways of being and knowing have led to the development of "Catholic mobs" who are Christianising in quite different ways from the Protestant adherents in Halls Creek. These differences are also a source of conflict between the Protestant and Catholic missions in East Kimberley.

Early period: UAM and Catholic church

Catholic-Protestant relations in missionary regions as elsewhere, at least until Vatican II (1963-65), were characterised either by mutual indifference or open hostility (Horner 1965:10). Mary Durack's book, *The Rock and the Sand* (1969) reveals the tensions that existed between Catholic and Protestant missions in the Kimberley. At the time of the Trappist Order's withdrawal from Beagle Bay Mission in 1900, Father Emo's major concern was "to save our natives from falling into the hands of Jews and Protestants" (Emo 1900, cited in Durack 1969:100). Post-war entry of non-conformist Protestant churches into East Kimberley was interpreted as a threat to the Catholic missionisation process.

Today: UAM and Catholic church

In public, the UAM and the Catholics claim to have friendly relations, and do attend each other's major functions, for example, the (Protestant) Christmas Carols service and the opening of the (Catholic) Red Hill school. In private, the UAM is quite critical of the Catholic church, particularly in relation to its extra-biblical traditions, such as the veneration of the Virgin and the saints. They disapprove of the Catholic mob's involvement in traditional religious ceremonies, and their open and apparently unsanctioned practice of evangelical Christianity's catalogue of sins: drinking, smoking, card playing, disco dancing, fighting, fornication and adultery.

However, the UAM is willing to concede that there are Christians within the Catholic church. Those for whom the sacrifice of Christ is central to their faith and life, will undoubtedly share in God's Kingdom. Others, "outside of Christ" and bound by legalistic rituals, are practising an empty religion.

Today: AOG and Catholic church

Tonight we are declaring in faith that Red Hill will be released from the power of Satan and won for Christ. Red Hill is bound by the Catholic church. They're going to celebrate Pentecost at Violet Valley with witchcraft signs painted all over their breasts. (Pastor Daniel, AOG)

The AOG church in Halls Creek, because of its rigidly fundamentalist stance, is openly hostile to the Catholic church. Frequent prayers are

made for the removal of the Catholic church from Aboriginal communities so that the AOG can enter. Binding, a curse formula practised in the ancient Near East to immobilise one's rivals or enemies (Gager 1992:175), found its way into Old Testament literature, and thereby became available to AOG adherents. It is practised in Halls Creek not only on Satan, but also on the agents of Satan, including the Catholic church.²⁸

Summary

In this chapter, after a general discussion of European colonisation and missionisation of the non-Christian world, I looked at the three churches in Halls Creek: their histories (in the Kimberley) and their changing theologies. Their evaluations of traditional Aboriginal ways of being (and consequently their missiologies) are also changing. The Catholic church made some major changes in its self-understanding and its understanding of other religions during Vatican Council II (1962-1965) but these changes were not acceptable to all parts of the church. As a consequence, a radical re-evaluation of Aboriginal religions was not incorporated into Catholic practice in the Kimberley until the 1980s.

In East Kimberley over the last ten to fifteen years, a new generation of missionaries has been noticeably liberalising UAM perceptions of Aboriginal cultures and religions. While they are not ready to accept the "fulfilment missiologies" of Arnhem Land Christianity, they are

²⁸ See page 192 for an example of the curse formula being practised in an AOG healing service.

beginning to develop a missiology that is inclusive of some aspects of Aboriginal life in the Kimberley. However, the missiological space they have vacated has readily been filled by the fundamentalist and aggressively evangelising AOG church.

Chapter 4 focusses on Aboriginal perceptions (and appropriations) of Christianity in their construction of a history of colonisation and missionisation in the Kimberley.

CHAPTER 4

MADDY JARRA'S WORLD HISTORY

The Beginning time

In the beginning, everyone in the world was good. God, people and *mamu/juwarri* (spirit forms) lived together. God looked after everybody because nobody did anything wrong. There was no sickness or dying. The earth and sky were not radically separated. People and spirits could move fairly easily between earth and sky travelling on the Milky Way track.

"Devil time"

A *juwarri* boss (Lucifer) tried to outwit God by cunning intelligence, and become boss over God. God separated heaven and earth and pushed Lucifer down to earth (with his *mamu/juwarri* followers). During "Devil time" (the Devil's boss-ship over the earth), the Devil tempted people (the reincarnated *mamu/juwarri*) to live wrong: living wild, naked, fighting, swearing, dancing corroborees, practising polygyny and child marriage, murdering each other, crying over dead bodies, and continually reincarnating themselves. Everyone followed the "Devil's way". God turned his back. He sent floodwaters, sickness and dying. Jesus, who loves all sinners, tried to come to Australia a number of times (during "Devil time") to take the people to Jerusalem or heaven, but each time he was thwarted by unforeseen circumstances. On one occasion God drowned all the people, and Jesus had to get away (to heaven). Finally, God sent Jesus down to earth as a baby. The Devil thought he could tempt Jesus to follow him. But Jesus, following God's example, pushed the Devil off the high cliff, down to hell.

"God time"

Today is "God time" (but "Devil time" still continues in parallel with "God time"). Whereas in the early days God looked after everybody because they never did wrong, today God looks after his own mob (that is, those who "listen to" him and "follow his way"), and the Devil looks after his mob. Both God's power and Devil's power are available to humans (accessed through ritual). The Christian pastors use God's power in the performance of their tasks while the

police use the Devil's power. This relates to Social Security payments, alcohol use, criminal offences, care of children and Welfare intervention. There is rivalry between God and the Devil in these spheres of daily life.¹

Most Aboriginal Christians in Halls Creek hold versions of this world history. The above is the strong (or unambiguous) version, held by people in their 40s and 50s, many of whom had some European schooling (and missionary teaching) at Moola Bulla government settlement. For these Christians, "Dream time" and "Moola Bulla time" have been subsumed into "Devil time", the time when people did not know God and Jesus and were locked into a continuous cycle of fighting, killing each other and turning into spirit forms in order to reincarnate themselves.

Maddy Jarra, a woman in her early 50s whose church affiliation includes both UAM (prior to the 1982 leadership crisis) and AOG mission churches, has constructed a world history by incorporating her father's and grandfather's stories and her own life experiences into a larger explanatory narrative framework. Localised Dreaming narratives no longer provide coherent frameworks² for people whose lives have been dominated and disoriented by an expanding pastoral industry, restrictive and punitive government regimes and missionary tuition which has denounced traditional ways of life as Satanic.

¹ This is a synthesis (and a paraphrase) of a number of people's voices. Their individual voices can be heard throughout this chapter.

² That is, they are unable to account for European colonisation. As Tonkinson states of the Mardu people of the Western Desert, they:

understood well the origin, nature, and workings of power emanating from the spiritual realm of the Dreaming, but had no explanation for that which accompanied the whites and emanated from various possible sources, such as 'the government' or 'God'. (Tonkinson 1991:160)

The East Kimberley was colonised initially by cattlemen from Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland who drove their herds overland in heroic epic journeys which are celebrated in Australia's pioneer literature (Broughton 1965, Buchanan 1933, Carnegie 1898, Durack 1959, 1969, Idries 1936, Quilty 1958, Willey 1971). The Buchanan and Gordon Brothers were the first to take up pastoral leases on Gurindji and East Jaru country, establishing Wave Hill, Flora Valley and Gordon Downs stations in the 1880s. Falling cattle prices forced these smaller pastoralists to sell out, and between 1913 and 1916 the English cattle company, Vestey Brothers, purchased these and seven other stations across the Northern Territory and East Kimberley, controlling a pastoral empire of 36,000 square miles (Kelly 1966:2).

The Aboriginal population was decimated firstly by dispersal killings and later by introduced diseases. During the mid 1930s a well remembered but little documented influenza-type epidemic killed hundreds of station people across the Kimberley from Fitzroy Crossing to the Northern Territory border (see Willey 1971:126). Population decline continued into the 1940s as a result of a falling birth rate and high infant mortality. By 1944 Vesteys had become sufficiently alarmed by the diminishing Aboriginal population and an impending labour shortage on their stations to contact Elkin, Professor of Anthropology and President of the Association for the Protection of Native Races. Elkin organised the Berndts to carry out an anthropological survey on Aboriginal labour within the northern Australian pastoral industry (Wise 1985:126,166).

Wave Hill Station in the Northern Territory was the co-ordinating centre for the Vestey's central western stations. It had also become a

labour pool for the Vestey stations. Although the local Gurindji population was being depleted, Mudbara, Walmajarri and Warlpiri groups from the southeastern and southwestern deserts were moving north, providing an illusion of population-renewal (Berndt and Berndt 1987:17, 97). Vestey managers recruited young Aboriginal boys for stockwork from the age of twelve years officially, but in practice they were often much younger (Berndt and Berndt 1987: 66, 67). Stockboys from the labour reservoirs on Wave Hill, Birrundudu and Gordon Downs stations were taken west to work on the population-depleted Vestey stations of the Kimberley.

Maddy Jarra's grandfather, a young man from Gordon Downs Station, was taken west to Margaret River Station in the early years of the Vestey acquisitions. Cattle, horses and Aboriginal labour from Gordon Downs were transported to the river plains station (South Gija/West Jaru country). North Gija people from the ranges country (specifically from Tablelands, Bedford Downs and Springvale stations) were also brought to Margaret River Station to work. Maddy's grandfather met and married a Gija woman from Springvale Station.

At Margaret River Station, the displaced people attempted not only to remake their families and communities, but to reconstruct from old and new territories and Dreamings a habitable world. They brought their desert and ranges Dreamings to the depleted river plains, reconnecting territories and making Margaret River Station a centre of Dreamtime activity and power. A Dreamtime story tells of two snakes of desert origin travelling a circuit which encompasses Tablelands, Wave Hill and Margaret River stations. At each campsite, a snake is dropped off and another from that place joins the journey, linking the

sites together in a common story line. The journey reaches its completion (and final resting place for the ancestral snakes) at Mary River on Margaret River Station. Today, a land claim is being made for this Mary River region by the descendents of the desert and ranges people who re-established a community and a sense of place on Margaret River Station.

Maddy Jarra's father and his generation consolidated this sense of place at Margaret River Station, carrying out "increase" (regeneration) ceremonies for country and people, organising marriages and other forms of alliance with neighbouring groups, and conducting funerary rituals for the dead. They were actively involved in the initiation of the next generation of young men into Aboriginal religious life, sending them to places as diverse as Moola Bulla, Balgo and Wave Hill for ritual knowledge and experience.

However, this generation was also the first generation of station Aborigines to be proselytised by Christian missionaries. Itinerant UAM missionaries firstly from Derby (in the 1940s) and later from the Fitzroy Crossing Mission (established in 1952) travelled throughout the East Kimberley. They held evangelistic outreach meetings on the stations in the evenings, camped overnight and moved on the next day. Maddy's parents and their children attended these UAM meetings. Her grandparents and their generation would not attend as their distrust of white men was too great.

The religion that the missionaries preached was a religion of placelessness which developed its utopian qualities in diaspora and exile (see Chapter 1). Expansion of empire and destruction of regional

kingships (during the hellenistic period) rendered the earthly realm vulnerable to the forces of chaos which had previously been successfully displaced to the periphery. Order and meaning could not be sustained in an environment which was continually subjected to shifting centres and disappearing boundaries. The disaffected upper classes of the Greek city-states transferred their hopes and goals on to an upper realm which was being furnished in appropriate splendour by Ptolemaic cosmology. Christianity, which inherited an earthly realm devalued by a hierarchised and hellenised cosmology, was a religion of placelessness par excellence, an appropriate religion to offer a dispossessed and displaced people.

The cattle station people listened to but did not appropriate this new religion. They were still living on Aboriginal land on which they continued to carry out ceremonial responsibilities. An afterlife in heaven separated from any meaningful relationship to land and kin was not an attractive proposition. However, Biblical stories were beginning to have an impact on the minds of this generation, particularly Old Testament stories whose plots are woven around the "universal" themes of land inheritance, land expansion and land loss. The Creation stories and the stories of the Fall (both of Lucifer and of Adam and Eve), stories of the Great Flood,³ and the Nativity Cycle captured the imagination of a people struggling to make sense of dislocation and subordination by a white technologised colonial power.

³ The Great Flood and Noah's Ark stories feature in a number of Aboriginal colonial narratives in the Kimberley (see Kolig 1980a).

This generation was also internalising pastoralist and missionary evaluations of Aboriginal ways of life. The pastoralists' tendency to polarise and differentially evaluate station blacks and bush (wild, myall, uncivilised) blacks led the Aborigines to develop an ambiguous relationship to traditional knowledge and practice. They still believed in its efficacy (and therefore continued to practise it) but they felt ashamed of it in the face of white displays of power-knowledge. The missionaries' abhorrence of nakedness, "blackness" (as a moral-spiritual concept), "uncontrolled" emotionality and sexuality, and pre-occupation with corporeal existence generally led Aborigines to become deeply ashamed of their very being.⁴

The experience of colonisation came to be understood to be somehow related to Aboriginal wrongness of being (and *ipso facto* to European rightness of being). Satan, the missionary explanation for Aboriginal sinfulness, became connected both to colonisation and to an Aboriginal sense of low self-worth. Satan was an agent of colonisation

⁴ I have, unfortunately, numerous examples of Aboriginal people denigrating themselves because of their blackness, their early days nakedness and "myallness" (ignorance of whitefella ways, including ignorance of God and Jesus), and their foraging way of life: "They were wild, just wandering in the bush" (LC). As stated by Jabia Crow, a UAM adherent,

They [blackfella] never had clothes. They never make nothing. They never know nothing. They just made a fire with a firestick. Make clothes from kangaroo. (JC)

A frequently heard phrase around Halls Creek is, "I'm just a rubbish blackfella". This statement is made by full-descent Aborigines when comparing themselves with *gardiya* or half-castes. Full-descent Aborigines expect half-castes to be richer, prettier and morally superior to themselves. They have assimilated the colour hierarchy that developed on pastoral stations with the birth of half-caste children. Half-castes have houses with furniture, their own beds and mattresses, and often their own cars. Many have good jobs in the town or in neighbouring towns. Town jobs require a proficiency with literacy and numeracy that station jobs did not. They hold positions of authority in Aboriginal organisations. On the whole, they manage to avoid police lock-up, courts and incarceration.

Older Aboriginal people, however, complain that half-castes are fussy like *gardiya*, are ashamed of their black grannies, and won't talk to black people in the street. Many older Aborigines will not enter the houses of half-caste people even if they are related to them.

because it was his presence on earth which encouraged the orgy of wrong living which caused God to turn his back and allow the forces of retribution to be unleashed.

The Beginning Time

In the light of the Biblical creation story, Aboriginal origins have become deeply problematic for Aboriginal people. Adam and Eve were the first humans to be created by God, and they were created white, in God's image. It is widely believed by Aboriginal Christians in Halls Creek that Aboriginal people did not come from Adam and Eve. They were not created in God's image.

One Aboriginal man (an AOG adherent) has developed an extremely pessimistic view of Aboriginal origins:

God was the first. Then he created the angels, then white men. White men were the first humans to be created. Then came Satan, then the Arabs, then blackfella. That's why it's harder for blackfella to believe [i.e. to align with/adhere to] the Christian way. (KJ)

For Kelly Jangala, white men have been following God's line from the beginning while Aborigines have been following Satan's line. That the Arabs have also been following Satan's line is not surprising as they are the enemies of God's people, the Israelites. Events occurring in the Middle East are frequently discussed in AOG circles, and the 1991 Gulf War brought these issues into sharper focus.

While it is true that God looked after everybody in the beginning time, everyone (in human and spirit form) was white. Aboriginal people

did not exist (as Aborigines) until the moral and spiritual fall of Satan. When Satan was pushed out of heaven into the darkness, he (and his followers) became dark. Aboriginal people are the reincarnations of Satan's *mamu /juwarri* followers.

Maddy Jarra, however, has developed a more optimistic view of Aboriginal origins. While whites and blacks have separate origins, and whites were the first to be created, Aboriginal people do not derive their being from Satan's fall. God created blacks and whites separate right from the start just because he wanted to:

God bin puttim twofella separate. He put white and black. Jesus is the white. Philip is the black.⁵ Well, we come from thatun now, from Philip. White people come from Jesus. Philip he bin first one, after Jesus. (MJ)

However, even in this revised version, God appears to have favoured whites over Aboriginal people. When God created the first white people, he gave them a garden to live in. But the blacks had to live wild in the bush. This situation of inequality was "remedied" by Satan, who, on his expulsion from heaven, turned into a snake and entered the garden of Adam and Eve in order to persuade them to follow him.

The snake tempted the woman, and the woman tempted the man. Woman is the troublemaker through by that lot. God bin hunt im out twofella now from garden. He bin make im twofella strip naked. Walking naked now, behind the bushes. "You fella gotta be wild now". (MJ)⁶

⁵ Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, was reputed to be dark in colour.

⁶ The idea that whites in their "original" state were unclothed was unthinkable to Maddy. Rather, their state of naked wildness was a punishment from God. As a result of their failure to follow God's way, they were not only exiled from their garden, but were stripped of clothes and other accoutrements of civilisation.

"Devil time"

Now both blacks and whites were wild. These "wild times"⁷ were frequently talked about by Maddy's grandfather and father when she was growing up:

My father was tell us story. Sometime my grandfather. All the fighters come from desert, or from Gordon Downs ... go through to Fitzroy [Crossing] or Christmas Creek. They was think about for corroboree: "Well, we might make im man". They was fighting one another. And God bin really sorry and turn his back. (MJ)

While the blackfella were busy playing corroborees and fighting one another, "wild *gardiya*" came from overseas and murdered nearly everybody:

Early days when *gardiya* bin shift round all the country, they was wild. They find im blackfella, shoot im, burn im up all the way. They bin finish im off. Clean im all lot for everywhere. (CL)

Massacres occurred during "Devil time", and are directly related to his malign influence. The Devil started fighting with God in heaven, and once expelled from God's presence, continued his activities on earth. Fighting broke out in Israel between the Arabs and God's Chosen People, which still continues today. In Australia, Aboriginal people

⁷ Trigger (1992:17-25) discusses the Aboriginal term, 'Wild Time', in his study of colonialism in the Gulf of Carpentaria region of northern Australia. Wild Time, characterised by "extensive violence in the bush" does not refer solely to conflict and violence between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but includes "intertribal" disputes before and during white colonisation. This time began before white incursions into the Gulf country and ended when the people had been "quietened down" in the early decades of the 20th century. Wild Time is not ascribed to any particular invading agency but occurred "because the country been wild" at that time. For Doomadgee Mission people, Dreamtime is prior to but also coterminous with Wild Time.

began fighting and killing each other. God turned his back, allowing marauding whites to almost annihilate them.

Maddy has attributed the colonisation process, including massacres, to Satan's estrangement from God, and in doing so, has absolved the whites of responsibility.⁸ The main features of early colonisation (fighting and killing) are behaviours which are categorised by missionaries as "sin" and as causally linked to Satan's corrupting influence. Fighting as a form of conflict resolution (see Langton 1988:202) practised by people with a kin-based polity and morality, is not recognised by missionaries. All fighting (within the boundaries of a civil society) is wrong and to be condemned, regardless of context. For Aboriginal Christians today, fighting is strongly associated with the "Devil's way" and as such is an appropriate behaviour for sinners but not for Christians.

⁸ This is a Christian Aboriginal interpretation of colonisation. Ross records other interpretations in East Kimberley (see Ross 1989:90; Ross and Bray 1989:1-5). In parts of West Kimberley and the Northern Territory, Captain Cook became a major symbol of colonisation:

The Cook myth points up the cause for the present dilemma under which Aborigines have to labour, it gives the reason for pain and injustice under which Aborigines have to suffer (Kolig 1980b:280).

Captain Cook's orders: 'Don't give him medicine... When they getting crook [sick], old people, you killem him first. When they on the job, that's right, you can have them on the job. But don't pay him. Let him work for free... If you put them on a job, make them prisoner' (Hobbles Danaiyairi, quoted in Rose 1992:18).

For Aboriginal people who live at Beswick Station, Captain Cook was around during the time of Satan. He lived before Adam and Eve and never did anything wrong. He had white man's power and white man's goods and money, but he never interfered with Aboriginal people. Satan had horns, bullock feet and fingers with long nails. He wanted to kill Captain Cook. They had a fight. Captain Cook won and Satan was chucked into a hole. It was only later Captain Cooks who began shooting and killing black people. They took all the women. They wanted to take all of Australia (Mackinolty and Wainburranga 1988:357-359). Captain Cook has a Christian God-like status in this story. He defeated Satan. It was only after his death that his followers (the white people) began killing Aboriginal people and taking their land.

After the "wild whites" died off, the next generation was a little more civilised according to old Aboriginal people. They built stations, grew up cattle and transformed Aboriginal people into station workers:

Get all the young people, take im for themselves, make good ringer out of im. They bin grow im up like a *gardiya*. Make im half a blackfella now. Make them talk English. (LP)

Killings continued during this time but only to recalcitrant blackfella who ran away from the stations. The most graphic massacre stories come from this early station period, but whites are again absolved of responsibility:

Good bloke never run away. Bloke which run away, *gardiya* grab im, put a chain, shoot im, chuck im in the waterhole, burn im up la fire. Blackfella bin wrong. Good bloke they never shoot im. (CL)

During station times, Aboriginal people were still living the "Devil's way". Alice Sim, an ex-resident of Moola Bulla government station, recites a litany of Aboriginal misdemeanours:

I know Moola Bulla time. They used to be still wild yet. They follow the *juwarri* line. *Juwarri* bin look after all the native people. And they bin fighting. Swear im bout. Troublemaker, and not good friend. Jealousing one another. They give im all about young-young girl married and promise im all about. They dancing corroboree, and flash and skiting. They bin murdering one another in the native law. Somefella bin turn into devil-devil. From *juwarri*, turn round to kangaroo, goanna, snake. They bin come back *jarriny* then.⁹ They wanna come back nother baby in the world. But that not in the Bible. The rules said no. (AS)

⁹ The process by which *mamu/juwarri* re-enter a woman's body to be born again (see Chapter 5).

When the missionaries came to East Kimberley, they dissociated themselves from the colonisation process by presenting themselves as teachers of "God's way", a way which does not allow fighting, killing and other destructive human vices. They also presented Aboriginal people with a history of the world that was comprehensive and detailed, and able to encompass both Aboriginal and white human conditions. Their message was simple. The world was created by a good God but has fallen into sin and decay as a result of Satan's rebellion against God. Jesus came to earth to break Satan's power over people's lives, allowing them once again to have fellowship with God.

However, this world history like the Creation story which forms its opening stanzas, held hidden dilemmas for Aboriginal people. If Jesus came to earth to save the world from Satan's grasp, why didn't he come to Australia? Why didn't he tell Aboriginal people about God's way instead of leaving them for so long to follow Satan and suffer colonisation? Again, it would appear that God was favouring whites over blacks.¹⁰

Some Aboriginal people have found congenial answers to these questions. Jesus loves all sinners and does not wish that any should perish. According to Jabia Crow, a UAM adherent, Jesus intended to come to Australia during "Devil time" to take the people to Jerusalem or heaven, but each time he was thwarted by unforeseen

¹⁰ Djiniyini Gondarra, an Aboriginal Christian leader in the Arnhem Land Uniting Church, would dispute the view that God favours whites over blacks. In his post-colonial theologising, he asserts that:

He [God] has the same concern for the Aboriginal as He has for white (balanda). He has no favouritism for one person. We have inspiring truth in the scripture about equality [Amos 9:7; Acts 10:34-35]... We no longer see Him as a white man's God or a God that the missionaries brought to us, but He is our God who has lived with us in history. (Gondarra 1986:13,14)

circumstances. On one occasion God drowned all the people because they were getting bad with sex, gambling and fighting. On another occasion the people crucified Jesus.

As well as presenting a coherent world history, the missionaries also presented the Aborigines with a life package: living "God's way". Station life, which offered a settled existence and the opportunity to acquire regular working habits, was compatible with evangelical Christianity. Jesus did not shun honest toil, working as a carpenter in his father's shop. When Jesus came to earth with God's message of reconciliation, most white people quickly returned to God's way (which they had only briefly abandoned). They returned to their gardens, and became once again clothed and civilised, with feelings of love for all mankind. Some came as missionaries to the black people who were still living a wild and uncivilised existence.

As a result of colonisation and dispossession, the denigration of a hunter-gatherer economy by pastoralists, and the condemnation of traditional cultural practices by evangelical missionaries, Aboriginal people, particularly those in their 40s and 50s, have made a number of fateful connections. Blackness, wildness and Satan have become inextricably connected, as have whiteness, civilisation and God.

Fanon's (1967) exploration of the psychoexistential dilemma of Antilleans of African descent reveals similar attempts by a displaced and subordinated people to reorganise black identity in relation to a white colonising power. Fanon talks about an unconscious desire to change colour, dreams of magically turning white, taking on whiteness and civilisation with the appropriation of the French

language, women escaping blackness by marriage to European men, and the impossible presumption of an Antillean man offering black love to a white (or half-caste) soul.

All of these scenarios exist in Halls Creek in the 1990s. Aboriginal people also have solutions for the stigma of blackness. One way to a better life is to become a "half-caste". This is not available to everyone, but it is discussed by women as possibilities (and as achievements) for their children. Becoming a "half-caste" can give one instant entry into a life-style that is still largely unavailable (and certainly perceived as such) to full descent people. In the past, Aboriginal people of mixed descent were offered better housing, education and employment opportunities in the pastoral industry and in town, and this legacy continues today.

Another route to a better life is to become a Christian. When you become a Christian, you become white on the inside.¹¹ In heaven, the colour transformation will be complete, as Christians will also be white on the outside, like Jesus. However, while Maddy Jarra could confidently predict that half-castes would be white in heaven, she could not imagine that possibility for herself. In heaven, Maddy will be brown like a half-caste.

Fanon's work on the colonisation of consciousness (and the unconscious) of Antilleans has attracted criticism, in particular that he has failed to look for discourses of resistance, or for counter-hegemonic impulses of any kind.¹² This criticism could also be

¹¹ See section titled **Colour Symbolism** in Chapter 5.

¹² As Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:6-31) have shown, colonised people do more than just conform to or resist hegemonic institutions and practices. They may creatively

levelled at my portrayal of Maddy Jarra's world history. Maddy's refusal to accept her origins as relating to Satan's fall, selecting instead Philip, a follower of Jesus, as her apical ancestor, could be interpreted as a counter-hegemonic strategy. But its possible liberating effect is muted by the fact that she is still operating within what she recognises as the dominant European discourse, that of Western Christianity. She has not questioned the missionaries' extra-biblical messages which denigrate indigenous spirits as demonic presences, and traditional Aboriginal ways of life as Satanic.

A Miriwung Catholic woman, strongly loyal to both Aboriginal and Catholic forms of knowledge and practice, has attempted a reversal of the Adam and Eve story. She shared these innovations with the white participants of the Kununurra Women's Law and Culture celebrations in 1989. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were Aboriginal people who lived in harmony with the land and with God. The early white man (of Anglo-Celtic origin) in the guise of an evil serpent came here and tempted them to sin. As a result, Aboriginal men have had to work the land (that is, participate in the pastoral economy) and Aboriginal women have pain and suffering in childbirth. Only the Catholics (who on the whole are not Anglo-Celtic Australians), can help Aboriginal people out of these problems.¹¹

The Catholic Church in the 1980s and 90s is seen as successful in helping Aboriginal people to return to the land and establish viable

manipulate the forces of colonisation by appropriating and transforming its signifiers according to their own cultural and political requirements. And not all "modes of resistance" are consciously articulated. These expressions may vary from symbolic constructions and performances to overtly political (in the Western sense) forms of struggle.

¹¹ The Catholic priests and nuns in East Kimberley have mainly come from religious orders in Germany and Italy.

Aboriginal communities. This is contrasted with the failure of the Department of Community Welfare in the 1970s to influence the Western Australian Government to respond to Aboriginal needs. Kathy Fisher's Adam and Eve story should be recognised as a piece of post-colonial discourse, relating to a new era of "independent" Aboriginal communities, and fuelled by the new (post-Vatican II) Catholic re-evaluation of other religions which was not incorporated into Kimberley Catholic practice until the 1980s.

In this story, responsibility for colonisation of Aboriginal Australia has been laid quite firmly at the feet of Europeans (although the Catholic Church has been absolved of any involvement). That Kathy Fisher's story is not also a piece of post-Catholic discourse relates to the ability of the Catholic Church (partially at least) to decolonise itself and offer a new vision of Aboriginal culture and religion as something which is under the protection and nurture of God.¹²

The response of the white (and feminist) participants of the Kununurra women's ceremonies¹³ to Kathy Fisher's story was not encouraging. Kathy's appropriation of a Biblical story (particularly one as retrograde as the Adam and Eve story) was seen as a backward step in Aboriginal people's strivings for social justice and cultural

¹² Pope John Paul II's address to the Aboriginal people of Australia at Alice Springs in 1986 commenced thus:

At the beginning of time, as God's Spirit moved over the waters, he began to communicate something of his goodness and beauty to all Creation... for thousands of years you have lived in this land... during all this time, the Spirit of God has been with you. Your Dreaming... is your own way of touching the mystery of God's Spirit in you and in Creation (Pope John Paul II 1987:9).

It could be argued, of course, that positing the presence of a male empire God in the histories and cultures of Aboriginal Australia, is a thoroughly colonising move.

¹³ White people employed by Aboriginal organisations such as the Kimberley Land Council and the Kimberley Language Resource Centre at an administrative level.

autonomy. Kathy was promptly advised that the Biblical Creation story was "just a fairytale" and she should not believe it. However, because the Catholic mob continues to "listen to" (that is, pay attention to) Catholic messages as well as to the opinions of white employees and co-workers in Aboriginal organisations, these stories may yet have a future.

Maddy Jarra, and adherents of the Protestant missions generally, have not yet begun a post-colonial discourse. It could be said that they have not yet entered a post-colonial era.¹⁴ Because the Western Australian government in the 1970s thwarted all efforts by the Department of Community Welfare to help Gija and West Jaru people acquire land and gain some independence, most people still reside in the town of Halls Creek and in a colonial relationship (including relationships of domination and subordination and various forms of paternalism) with state and local government bodies and Christian missions.

However, contrary to (white) public knowledge, most Aboriginal adherents of the UAM and AOG are today affiliated with groups that are acquiring land. Until the Mabo era of 1993 land acquisition in Western Australia was limited to pastoral excisions or the purchase of pastoral stations.¹³ As this type of land claim involves negotiations

¹⁴ I refer here to Aboriginal people's aspirations for independence from white hegemony. As Kolig (1989:33) states:

Their main goal is a form of segregation which will enable them to achieve the necessary measure of detachment from White hegemony and thus once again give them control over their own existence... a kind of Apartheid in reverse: a separation willed and desired by a politically powerless group so that they may be able to live their own lives, at their own pace, and realising their own ideals.

¹³ From 1972 (under a new Labor Government), the Aboriginal Trust Fund Commission purchased a number of pastoral leases for Aboriginal people, vesting them in the Aboriginal Lands Trust of Western Australia. At this time it also became possible for Aboriginal communities to receive grants for community development projects. Aboriginal claims for land became stronger with the formation of the Kimberley Land

with (often hostile) white pastoralists, the process is slow and frustrating. A number of these claims were initiated by AOG and UAM adherents, of whom Maddy Jarra is one. While the current UAM attitude towards land acquisition is relatively benign (they do not involve themselves in land claims but neither do they preach against them), the AOG leadership equates Aboriginal land acquisition with Satan-inspired communist conspiracies.

However, it is not uncommon for AOG Aborigines to find themselves in situations where the missionaries say one thing and God says another. While the missionaries frequently criticise Aboriginal people and their values, God is able to take an Aboriginal point of view, for example, in matters of sexuality and family relationships (as revealed in dreams). The missionaries are also seen at times as failing to follow Biblical principles, for example, failing to exhibit universal love, in their relationships with Aboriginal people.

Despite AOG preaching to the contrary, in matters of land acquisition, Maddy Jarra has found God on her side. She has distilled a legitimising discourse from Old Testament narratives which are frequently expounded on in AOG sermons, particularly from the Abrahamic traditions which were developed by the post-exilic Israelite returnees as a strategy for repossessing Palestine (Ahlstrom 1993:182):

God bin talk to me. We gotta get all the family and go and live on that [Mary River] country now. Like Abraham and Moses travel to nother country that God bin give im. We gotta live there, all the family. (MJ)

I would expect that when Aboriginal adherents of the Protestant churches have finally been granted land tenure, and are able to move away from the colonial towns to develop "independent" communities, that this new experience of autonomy will stimulate a re-reading of Judaeo-Christian narratives, and the generation of post-colonial discourses.

To return to Maddy Jarra's colonial discourse, and in particular to the time of Satan's unfettered power on earth, God at this time saw fit to send Jesus to earth as a baby to reconcile the world to himself. For older people, particularly for people who have not received a European (and missionary) education, and who therefore have a positive view of reincarnation, reincarnation was the method by which God sent Jesus to earth, and this is something he continues to do today (see Chapter 5). During Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, the Devil vainly tried to make Jesus follow him. Jesus prayed to his Father, and the Devil turned into a Bullock Foot (revealing his true nature). Then Jesus, following God's example, pushed the Devil off the high cliff down to hell.

"God time"

Today is "God time" (but "Devil time" still continues in parallel with "God time"):

There's two living now. The Devil is still on [today] because people can't believe [in God]. They still living the old life. Following the *juwarri* line. Nobody is good yet. They gotta find out when Jesus come back gotta white horse. (AS)

Whereas in the early days God looked after everybody because they never did wrong, today God looks after his own mob (that is, those who "listen to" him and "follow his way"), and the Devil looks after his mob.

Middle-aged people in Halls Creek, particularly those who had a Moola Bulla/Fitzroy Crossing mission education, make a sharp distinction between "God's way" and "Devil's way". The "Devil's way" is composed of the practices and predilections of the Devil himself. These include traditional Aboriginal practices which fail to acknowledge God's sovereignty or are in some other way unbiblical. Included here are the traditional (or local) emotions of jealousy, anger and sorrow-revenge. Evangelical Christianity's catalogue of sins, for example, drinking, smoking, card playing, disco dancing, fighting and swearing fill out the profile. The AOG adds an extra number of sins to this general list, for example, watching television, failure to attend church, and money worries (that is, reliance on an indigenous exchange system).

Although the "Devil's way" is constructed in opposition to "God's way", as a style of life it is not without benefits. The Devil looks after his own mob (that is, all the sinners). In pre-Christian East Kimberley, local spirits (*mamu/juwarri*) looked after their own mobs, that is, their own relations. However, with the coming of the missionaries and the alignment of local spirits with Satan, many Christians have disowned their *mamu/juwarri*. The *mamu*-demons now have a new category of people to look after: the drinkers, the fighters, the sinners.

When drinkers are away from camp, a *mamu*-demon (or devil-devil)

looks after their swags and possessions. He guides them safely home from the Pub at night and guards their sleeping bodies and their grog supplies. If they are heavily intoxicated, he talks to them in their dreams and wakes them so they will not pass away in their sleep. When parents are inebriated and unable to take care of their children, the *mamu*-demon watches over them, protecting them from danger and harm.

However, according to some Aboriginal Christians, the Devil's methods of looking after his mob leave much to be desired. The Devil is not a good owner or boss because he is bound by "traditional" loyalties, prejudices and emotions. The Devil (and his demons) are jealous and capricious, sometimes favouring and helping their mobs and at other times abandoning them, sometimes wanting everyone to be friends and at other times inciting hatred and division.

In going "God's way", the Christian gives up the activities associated with other ways, and follows the prescriptions for living laid down by the missionaries. However, in practice, things are not so clear cut. Degrees of correctness are tolerated, as in "traditional" life, and some people cheerfully admit to being "only half Christian" (that is, they follow the activities of a number of ways according to the advantages of each). I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.

God's power and Devil's power

Both "God's power" and "Devil's power" are available to humans (accessed through ritual). While, in the Beginning times, God and the Devil (Lucifer) had the same powers and used them for the same

purposes, today there is rivalry between God and the Devil. The original cosmic courtroom drama between the Prosecutor and Defender of human souls plays itself out daily in the Halls Creek local arena. The Christian pastors use God's power in the performance of their tasks while the police use the Devil's power.

Historically, the police were seen as oppressors of Aboriginal people. In most Kimberley districts in the early days, the police were given the role of local Protector of Aborigines, and in this capacity were involved in enforcing employment conditions on pastoral stations, removing mixed-descent children to Moola Bulla and other more distant institutions, acting as gate-keepers to and from Aboriginal reserves, as well as exercising their power to arrest Aboriginal people without warrant (Bolton 1981:130,131).¹⁴

In a film about the End of the World screened at the UAM church in 1991, police are shown as working in collaboration with the Antichrist, harassing and de-privileging Christians who refuse to have the sign of the Beast (666) written on their foreheads. Aboriginal adherents of the AOG church refer to the Halls Creek police as 666. The relationship between the Devil and the police plays itself out against the daily entanglement of Aboriginal people in a colonial and punitive European legal system:

If the police have a warrant out for you [for failure to pay a fine], but you are going God's way, the police forget about you. But if you start drinking again [i.e. going back to the Devil's side, and no longer, therefore, under the protection of God], the Devil reminds the police about you. (LP)¹⁵

¹⁴ See Kolig 1987:18-24 on the southern Kimberley stories of the killer policeman, Constable Pilmer.

¹⁵ The non-payment of fines is still a major cause of imprisonment for Aboriginal

Basically, the Devil wants to put people in gaol, and God wants to get them out. This has been going on since the Beginning, and occurs at both local and cosmic levels. God's actions in getting the apostles out of gaol in New Testament times are discussed in relation to Aboriginal incarceration in the Kimberley. At the cosmic level, Satan, the Accuser of souls in God's heavenly court, aims to take as many people as possible with him to his final incarceration in hell.

Rivalry between God and the Devil also manifests itself in other dimensions of the colonial relationship in Halls Creek, for example, in relation to Social Security payments, alcohol use, criminal offences, care of children, and Welfare intervention. While God is frequently on the side of the Christians, he can behave as a strict *gardiya* at times, expressing affront at deviant behaviour and de-privileging people from Social Security or Welfare support.

The Devil, while generally behaving in ways that are unacceptable to God, does not always appear to be acting in opposition to God. At times he would seem (in his own way) to be collaborating with God. For example, *mamu*-demons can heal people (either directly or through *mabarn* healers) and then send them to hospital. From there, the hospital, which until the 1980s was an Australian Inland Mission (Presbyterian) institution, can direct them to the church, to go "God's way".

people in Western Australia despite recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (RCIADIC) to find alternatives to incarceration for fine default (Ayres 1994:19).

For some older Aboriginal Christians who have not totally demonised and discarded their family spirits, while it is evident from his actions that God hates the Devil, it is not at all evident that the Devil (and his *mamu/juwarri* followers) hate God. For Jabia Crow, God is jealous of Lucifer because they have the same powers. If the Devil was totally free to follow his own devices, he may gain more followers than God and ultimately become the more powerful. For this reason God tells people to resist the advances of the Devil.

Although most Aboriginal Christians in Halls Creek hold versions of "Maddy Jarra's world history", generational (and other) differences in view point can be quite startling. Middle-aged Moola Bulla educated people generally make a sharp distinction between "God's way" and "Devil's way". They have conflated "Dream time" and "Moola Bulla time" into "Devil time", a time when Aboriginal people did not know Jesus and God and were following Satan's way. However, for older people (in their 60s and 70s) and middle-aged people who grew up on cattle stations away from the influence of Moola Bulla and who have positive memories of traditional life, "Dream time" and "Moola Bulla time" (or "Government time") together with corroborees, *mabarn* healing and reincarnation, have been slotted into "the Beginning time when everyone was good", that is, the time when God was looking after everyone.¹⁵

¹⁵ Rose's (1988:368) analysis of key events helps to clarify what could be seen here as a confusion of ideas:

Key events are Dreaming actions with specific moral content; other events, other persons, other images will be conflated with the key event if they share in the same moral content. Key events, I contend, are open-ended in that they attract and accommodate specificity; they are continuously emergent... also a process of accommodating new elements within an existing order.

God and Lucifer (and all the *mamu/juwarri*) had the same powers and used them mainly for life-enhancing purposes. *Mabarn* healers (in Australia) were gifted by God at a time when there were no *gardiya* doctors, medicines or hospitals. Although Lucifer did eventually fall from grace and lead people astray, *mamu/juwarri* spirits were (and are) not unambiguously following the "Devil's way". They have their own way which is quite distinct from "God's way" or "Devil's way". They live on the earth helping and empowering their own countrymen until they decide their family can manage without them and they can think about being reincarnated.

According to Jabia Crow, a UAM adherent in her early 70s, missionaries don't understand *mamu/juwarri* spirits:

Just because they're white, they don't want to hear about devil-devil [*mamu/juwarri*]. Only black people know for devil. That's true what cleverman tell us. Blackfella we believe that. I always think about *juwarri* and God. I reckon two of them exactly same. (JC)

These views have not survived into the following generations of UAM and AOG adherents.

Children born on the cattle stations who were too young to have a Moola Bulla/Fitzroy Crossing mission education, received a primary education at the Halls Creek state school. The UAM missionary in Halls Creek encouraged the station people to send their children to school. A government-run children's hostel was built in town to accommodate the station children, and the missionary was able to exert his influence to have the hostel children attend the UAM church services each week.

Aboriginal people who are in their 20s and 30s today often spent years in children's hostels in the towns while their parents were working on cattle stations. A small number attended high school in Derby where both the UAM and Catholic Church had established children's hostels. In the 1960s, mixed descent families, encouraged by the Protestant missionaries, began sending their children to Perth for a secondary education.

For younger UAM Christians (in their 20s and 30s), the Aboriginal spirit world has no ontological reality. Only God and the Devil are real. Everything else is an illusion constructed by the Devil to mislead people and turn them away from God.

Have you seen a spirit walking round? I never seen a dead spirit walking round yet. I don't believe in that thing. They [i.e. the old people] never seen it. Could they prove they seen a *mamu* walking round? That's the real Devil himself fooling all the people who believe in them things. He makes himself look like that person who died. (LS)

Younger UAM Christians who have spent eight to ten years in a European schooling system, have been exposed to the assumptions of Western post-Enlightenment discourse, particularly to the universalising themes of reason, truth and progress. They appear to live in a disenchanted world (a world also inhabited by the UAM missionaries), which although subject to Divine intervention, can be analysed in terms of scientific naturalism, modern rationality and objective knowledge.

These younger Christians have appropriated an array of dualisms deriving from hellenistic Mediterranean religions and the Western Enlightenment project: seen/unseen, spirit/matter, heaven/earth, divine/human, creator/created, good/evil, reason/emotions and subject/object. For Liby Sheeran, humans have divine (not ancestral) life-force which does not extend beyond bodily boundaries into the living environment, animals and plants lack spirit (ancestral life-force), life-forms of one category cannot be transformed into life-forms of another category, reincarnation is not a possibility, and death rituals (blood shedding, food taboos and smoking ceremonies) which attend to the relationship between the living and the dead, are unnecessary (because the relationship has been severed) and possibly harmful.

For younger AOG Christians, reality is rather more complex. Unlike the UAM Christians who deny a local/regional spirituality in favour of a universalised world view, the AOG Christians still tend to live within a local cosmology. As children they spent fewer years than UAM young people within a European schooling system, frequently absconding from school to spend long periods with their families on the cattle stations.

For these young people, the lived-in universe is still largely consubstantial. While there is a growing ontological separation between heaven and earth, and between creator and created, the earthly realm has maintained its "traditional" integrity. Earthly life-forms share one continuous substance and are therefore substitutable, for example, humans can transform themselves into animals. Although, as a result of missionary teaching, young AOG adherents often emphatically deny the existence of *mamu/juwarri* (spirits of the

dead) on earth, reincarnation is still a common and expected occurrence. Because AOG Christians are such frequent backsliders, their spirits often do not reach heaven, and have to fend for themselves on earth.

The land/body connection has not been totally severed. AOG young people continue to interpret local signs in the land and in their bodies. Events occurring in the world are reflected in bodily symptoms. There is a moral connection between humans and other life-forms. However, despite this, older AOG adherents claim that the young people do not know their own bodies, or their grandmothers' bodies.¹⁶

¹⁶ It has been said that those who ignore the land cannot know themselves (Anon). Williams (1986:52), who examined Yolngu land/people relationships, characterises the *mari-gutharra* relationship, i.e. the relationship of a man to his MM(B) country and people, as the "backbone" of Yolngu society. This relationship encompasses reciprocal rights and responsibilities:

Each individual is a member of his or her father's landowning group... [and] also has rights in, and responsibility for the estate of his mother's patrilineal landowning group and that of his mother's mother... The children of the female members of these groups (in other areas of Australia collectively referred to as "managers" in this role) hold the right of assent or veto to any major decision that affects their mother's land or their mother's mother's land. (Williams 1986:52)

In return for "looking after" the country and people of his MM(B) group, a man would expect them to provide him with future wives (p 53) and, thus, flesh for offspring. At death, a man's spirit may be restored to his ancestors via the substance (e.g. a painting) of his MM(B) Dreaming (Morphy 1991:113).

Peterson, Keen and Sansom (1977) refer to these rights and responsibilities as primary and secondary. Under certain conditions (e.g. landowning groups dying out, colonial dislocation and prolonged land use), secondary rights can be transformed into primary rights (Morphy 1991:113; Povinelli 1993:134). To exercise one's secondary rights and responsibilities is to fulfil one's obligations and maximise one's life-chances. To "know one's grandmother's body" is to be a knowledgeable and responsible kinsperson.

Summary

This chapter has focussed on Halls Creek people's construction of a world history that can help make sense of Aboriginal dispossession, dislocation and subordination by a white colonial power. Traditional Aboriginal stories are unable to account for European colonisation but Biblical narratives with their "universal" themes of land inheritance, expansion and loss have become an important source of knowledge for Aboriginal people.

While the conservative evangelical Christian tradition imposes its own thematic coherence on the Old and New Testaments, and proselytises others from this traditional perspective, Aboriginal people in Halls Creek have made different connections between Biblical teachings (mediated by their cultural and political understandings of the world) and have constructed their own continuous narrative (with many idiosyncratic detours) which is quite unlike any missionary religious instruction.

However, as this chapter shows, Aborigines are not simply constructing an elaborate world history in order to "make sense of" a traumatic and disorienting event in their lives. That they have already internalised colonial subjection is evident from their comments on states of being such as blackness, wildness and nakedness. Maddy Jarra's world history could be seen as a piece of colonial theologising. In this narrative, apart from the Beginning time when there was no trouble in the world, God has only a background role. It is Satan who takes centre stage and he is not yet ready to relinquish this. Today, in East Kimberley, God and the Devil are still

locked together in a relationship of jealousy and rivalry.

In Chapter 5 I look at Aboriginal understandings and experiences of being Christian.

CHAPTER 5

BEING CHRISTIAN

Conversion

The mythology of conversion in Western Christianity since the 18th century has focussed around the notion of a total transformation of one's "inner being" in response to a personal encounter with the saving love of Christ. This intensely individualistic notion, however, has a relatively short history in Western Christianity. St. Augustine (354-430) did not link his conversion with a personal encounter with a Christ who sacrificed his life to save the world. Rather, his concern was with Divine Wisdom and the Word (Krailsheimer 1980:22,158).¹

St. Bernard of Clairvaux and other 12th century mystics appropriated the aristocratic-chivalric language of courtly love to construct a dynamic relationship between the human soul and God. The (feminised) soul was the virgin bride of Christ who surrendered to her Bridegroom in ecstatic mystical union. This notion of romantic love permeated 16th century Protestant models of conversion, though tempered by a Calvinistic emphasis on sin and hell.

The Puritan schema which articulated stages of conversion from "conviction of sin" through to "full sanctification" became the basic model for Protestant conversion (Krailsheimer 1980:157). This model

¹ Bakhtin (1981:135) maintains that "even today one cannot read St. Augustine's *Confessions* 'to oneself'; it must be declaimed aloud - to such an extent is the spirit of the Greek public square still alive in it." He is referring to the exteriority of public man in Europe which did not exist in a social vacuum but found its voice within the human collective of the civic square.

appropriated a conception of the self that emerged during the European Renaissance, a self that had become detached from other selves and developed an emotional and spiritual inwardness.² In Protestant conversion, the individuated self forms a direct personal relationship with a singular transcendent God.

The romantic self which developed in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, withdrew even further from the surfaces of life, constructing a deep interiority which sought communion with a distant (and unpolluted) infinity. It was this deep romantic self which participated in the great 18th Evangelical Revival, charismatic offspring of English Puritanism and German Pietism. Revivalist conversions produced during states of collectively induced emotional-physiological arousal emphasized an individualistic subjective religious experience.

These two strands of individualism and romantic love have continued into 20th century evangelical conversions. Ullman (1989:xvi) describes 20th century religious conversions as a process "akin to falling in love". Although in his research into the conversion process, Ullman was looking primarily for reorganisation of personal identity at an ideological and social level, what he found was an intense emotional attachment to a perceived all-wise and unconditionally loving parental figure (p xvi-xvii). While the parental figure was most often male in the conversions studied, the sought for relationship was a "non-demanding and totally protective

² The spectacular medieval body dematerialised as subject (withdrawing from public view into garments, enclosed architectural spaces, institutions, and writing) and was reinvented as a purely material object which could be manipulated by increasingly bio-medical curing practices among other things. The etherealised self became interiorised within the material body object (Barker 1984:12, 94-97; Young 1993:124-125).

relationship usually associated with early maternal care" (p 58).

According to feminist theologian, Mary Grey (1989), while since the 18th century in Western Christianity God has been portrayed in intimate familial terms as our loving heavenly Father, his relational qualities (of tenderness, nurturance and acceptance) have been drawn from a mother-child, not a father-child relationship model. For Ullman (1989:25), 20th century religious conversions in highly individualistic Westernised societies, are more concerned with relationality than with a quest for truth.

Conversion in Germanic and Celtic Europe, as in Graeco-Roman society at the time of Christ, had more to do with efficacy than with relationality or truth. Celtic peoples resisted developing an exclusive one-to-one relationship with a singular transcendent Deity, preferring to cultivate a multiplicity of local and regional cults (Brown 1982:218-220). They were not willing to transfer all meaning and value away from local beings and places to a distant and transcendent universal realm. They used the potent symbols of Christianity (for example, Bibles, crosses, holy water) for local/protective rather than for universal/salvific purposes.

"Following the way"

When Halls Creek Aboriginal people talk about what it is to be a Christian, they talk about "following a way" rather than undergoing a life-transforming experience. Being is not separated from doing, and efficacy has more salience than questions of relationality or truth.

Traditionally, there were as many "ways" as there were peoples and lands. While one's own truth and morality was always more correct than other people's, some ways were demonstrably more efficacious than others. Each "way" had its own set of rules or laws laid down by the creative ancestors. As long as one followed one's own way properly, one would be in a right moral relationship to the rest of the world, and would thereby be protected from potentially malignant outside forces. If one broke one's laws, one should expect misfortune to befall them. However, taking risks (by breaking the laws) and pitting one's wits against the elements, was part of the human (and ancestral) condition.

In becoming a Christian, one gives up the practices associated with other ways, and follows the prescriptions for living laid down by the missionaries. So long as one is following God's way properly (that is, adhering to his rules or laws), one can claim to be a Christian (with all the benefits that entails). If one returns to the ways of the Devil, one can no longer call oneself a Christian, and cannot reasonably expect God's care and protection.

However, Aboriginal people appear to have reorganised evangelical Christianity's catalogue of sins according to their own scale of values. Some sins (for example, tobacco chewing, smoking and card playing) are considered to be relatively minor and are indulged in (to a greater or lesser degree) by AOG Christians, and more rarely, by UAM Christians.³ Sins such as drinking, swearing and fighting which disrupt community life, and produce consequences which resemble "Devil time" are considered to be more serious. It is not so much the purity of one's "inner life" which is

³ Minor sins can produce undesirable effects in the living environment, for example, premature births have been linked to card playing mothers.

at issue here, as the effects one's behaviour can have on the social body and on the cosmos generally.

"Breaking the law" is also part of the human condition, and it has not gone unnoticed by Aboriginal Christians that Biblical characters, like Dreaming beings, frequently failed to meet the standards of the way they were following. The story of King David, hero of the Israelites' golden age and progenitor of the world's Messiah, falling into sin, creates both hilarity and relief amongst Aboriginal Christians. It can also provide legitimisation for one's own behaviour. AOG Christians frequently admit to being "a little bit sinner, like David" or like some other fallible Biblical character.

Perfection is not an appropriate human (or ancestral) goal for most Aboriginal people in Halls Creek. There is a mix of good and bad in everyone. The long and tortuous road which led to the gods of the Mediterranean religions embracing goodness and eschewing evil did not take place in Aboriginal Australia. Aborigines have been able to live with and accommodate contradictions in people and in the world and do not feel the need to totally isolate and displace all forms of evil.

Backsliding is very common in the AOG. Aboriginal Christians refer to it as "sinning sneaking".

They [some AOG Christians] play cards sneaking, drink grog sneaking, swearing sneaking and fighting sneaking. (SA)

One can "sin sneaking" and remain an active and participating member of the church. However, if one's sin becomes public knowledge, one is labelled a backslider and is treated accordingly by the AOG leadership. One

is stripped of one's church positions and may not pray for lost souls until one has produced adequate evidence that one has forsaken the sin and returned to the spiritual fold.

While there is a core group of people in the AOG church who have forsaken the ways of the Devil, for the large majority, backsliding is a fairly permanent condition:

Everybody bin come [to church]. All the drunks, and the sober ones. And they bin fall back. They bin come Christian. Then they fall back. Then they come Christian again. And fall back again. (MJ)

Power and the Holy Spirit

While evangelical Christianity in the last 200 years has portrayed God in terms of parental love (and this is the view reflected in UAM teaching), for Aboriginal people in Halls Creek, efficacy is a more urgent need than relationality or truth. This Aboriginal concern with efficacy coincides with the AOG emphasis on Holy Spirit power (a concept which has black roots. See Chapter 6), and for this reason many Aborigines today find the AOG a congenial form of Christianity.

For Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, the ideal human state is a state of invulnerability. This ideal is not achieved in isolation from human relationality and responsibility, but within a dense network of reciprocal rights and obligations. Colonisation and welfare dependency have increased rather than reduced this need for invulnerability. Life is more precarious for Aboriginal people today than it was during "station (or

government) times".⁴

"Traditionally", the ancestors were seen as sources of power and knowledge. One received portions of ancestral life-force at birth, and a person's life-force was built up by infusions of ancestral power during his or her life-time. Ancestral power was a localised but not an individualised power. Human life-force was not contained by bodily boundaries but flowed between life-forms and was vulnerable to moral and social changes within the living environment.⁵

Ancestral power was seen as an extension of the human life-force (which originally came from the ancestors) and not something radically discontinuous with a person's ordinary human existence. Power was needed to enhance one's performance in daily life, for example, for success in hunting, and to protect one from dangerous or malevolent forces. Human sexuality was part of, not discontinuous with, this life energy continuum.

Holy Spirit power, however, has a different genealogy. Although appropriated from ancestral shrines, it developed its shape and content within hierarchical and centralising politico-cosmic structures. Within the Jerusalem Temple traditions, it was purified of earthly and human contaminants. As a New Testament post-resurrection power, it became universalised and salvific, unlike local/protective ancestral powers.

⁴ The long pastoral era enabled Aboriginal people to stabilise again after the period of widespread killing, and to maintain their relationships with the land, their knowledge, and opportunities to socialise most of their children themselves. (Ross 1989:53)

⁵ Morphy (1991:103) describes ancestral power (*maarr*) in northeast Arnhem Land as a generalised power. That is, while it is always specific in its source, emanating from particular ancestors such as Crocodile or Shark, it can be general in effect. In regional ceremonies where different land-language groups participate, *maarr* can be dispersed throughout the region, spreading out to influence all who participate.

European Christians need Holy Spirit power to extend the work of Jesus (saving souls) in the world. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he promised his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower them to continue God's work on earth (Mark 16:15-18). The Holy Spirit imparts to Christians a spirit of boldness to enable them to preach God's Word fearlessly and to witness to others of God's transforming power in their lives. Christians also need Holy Spirit power to engage in prayer warfare against the enemy of souls and the kingdom of darkness.⁶ The Holy Spirit acts in the world (that is, the world of the unsaved), convicting people of sin, and preparing hearts to receive the Word of God.

Jesus also promised his followers that when the Holy Spirit came upon them in power that they would do greater works than he had performed on earth (John 14:12). For this reason, AOG Christians are continually looking for signs and wonders (miracles, healings etc) in their ministries as confirmation of the Holy Spirit's continued presence with them.

Holy Spirit power also holds an attraction for Aboriginal Christians in Halls Creek. However, they do not perceive this power in terms of the great universal project of saving the world for God. Aboriginal needs are much more immediate and local. The majority of Aboriginal Christians still live within a local cosmology inhabited by powers and agencies that exist in relationship to each other and to humans. The behaviour of humans produces effects in the living world.

⁶ These are the factors stressed most commonly in the Halls Creek AOG church. Less aggressively evangelising Pentecostal churches emphasize the importance of charismatic gifts in building up the Christian community in faith and love.

Humans must strive to live in a relationship of balance with other powers and agencies in the world.⁷ Ideally, a person's life energy increases as one gets older. But one's strength can be diminished by events occurring in the world, particularly negative experiences whether physical, social or moral (these are not separate categories in Aboriginal thinking). Colonisation has rendered this fragile balance much more precarious. Aborigines in Halls Creek experience colonisation as loss of power, both in their bodies and in the world around them:

Gardiya got strong body. Blackfella got weak body. Native way he feel weak. Nevermind he half-caste, he still weak. White people got a strong body. (AS)

My grandmother used to tell me this place [Moola Bulla] was real nice and green. They used to have a lovely springwater long long time ago. He used to run down from that top, down to creek. And fish used to be there. But when we were grow up now, that thing were dying off. This time they're dry grass and tree. (JC)⁸

Gardiya got rich from blackfella country. *Gardiya* is good for country. Blackfella only good for grog. (PB)

What Aborigines desire from God is not love (which they do not lack) but power. The country and the ancestors are unable to give Aboriginal people the kind of power and confidence they need to deal with the complexities of bureaucratised colonial and post-colonial institutions.⁹ Holy Spirit power, on the other hand, because it is *gardiya* power (it is the power that emanates from the white God and has always been available to *gardiya*), is

⁷ See Rose (1992:44-45, *passim*) on the notion of balance in Aboriginal philosophies.

⁸ Kolig (1987:52) notes that Aboriginal people on Noonkanbah Station believe that land restored to them and cared for once again in a traditional manner has become greener.

⁹ The country and the ancestors are still seen as sources of power by older Aboriginal Christians, but because this power is frequently involved in practices condemned by missionaries (for example, family feuds), Aboriginal Christians agonise over whether they should use it or not.

the right power for Halls Creek living. It provides immunity against potentially dangerous situations and it helps people to speak up to powerful *gardiya*.

What for you frightened [of a strange *gardiya* entering their property]? You God way. You bin take meeting not long ago. (M)

He [Holy Spirit] go in la your heart. Make you strong inside. You can't frighten for anything. You don't have to be shy. You can talk to anybody. (JC)

AOG Christians claim that Holy Spirit power is available in their church, but not in the UAM:

The UAM can't help us. They got no power. They got no spirit, no life. The AOG is the strong church. (JW)

You can go to the UAM, but they don't teach you anything. They don't know anything. They got no power. In the AOG you can feel the Holy Spirit. (DH)

UAM Christians on the other hand, do not talk so much about Holy Spirit power. Pentecostal interpretations of Holy Spirit activity are not taught in the present day UAM. The majority of UAM adherents are mixed descent Aborigines who have better knowledge of and easier access to white (and Aboriginal) bureaucracies than AOG adherents. These days their children and grandchildren work in these institutions, administering both governmental and non-governmental services to their own people.

The blood of the Lamb

The life is in the blood

In early Mediterranean thought, human "life-force" coursed through the bloodstream, dispersing to all parts of the body as an energising force. It could be seen physically as a vaporous breath arising from warm blood (Sullivan 1995:54). It was a life-generating, procreative force that was transferable between life-forms. Blood also carried the qualities and potencies of a person, for example, royal qualities such as nobility and valour were believed to be infused in the blood of kings and princes (Kantorowicz 1957:331). The blood also carried the tumultuous emotions that originated in body organs or flowed in from outside sources. Outside the body, the life-force could assume any shape it wished to enable it to carry out its intentions.

Life-force was also exchanged between the living and the dead. Humans had access to the bones of the dead which were a repository of ancestral life-force. And Mediterranean ghosts and gods required the blood of the living to vivify and animate them (Bergmann 1992:26). The earliest transfers of blood between the living and the dead were not sacrifices, at least in the classic sense, that is, the offering of a slaughtered animal to a deity in propitiation or homage. Rather, they were part of a system of reciprocal exchange. Ancestors and gods were not independent and self-subsisting but existed in a relationship of recognised mutuality with humans.

"Feeding the gods"

At burial sites in classical Athens, blood was poured down tubes into the cists containing bones or ashes. It was also poured directly on to the earth. Ghosts and gods came up from Hades to refresh themselves at the pools of blood (Finucane 1982:7-14). This practice was known as "feeding the gods". Hungry gods (that is, gods who have not been fed), became dangerous to the living. The Israelites likewise, throughout the period 1200-586 BC, provided sustenance for and consulted with the dead. Bowls, jars and jugs left at caves, tombs and cist graves contained food and wine, oil (for cooking and lighting), perfumes and spices (Bloch-Smith 1992:105-121).

Sacrifice is an agricultural practice which reveals the dependence of humans on domesticated plants and animals (Smith 1987:197). Domesticated animals consumed the crops and must return some of their life-force to the fields and to the grain deities who were the guardians of fields and seed. The life-blood of the slaughtered animal was poured on to the ground to recycle the life-forces and to bring about renewal of the earth.¹⁰ However, as gods changed their political and moral relationship to the cosmos and to humans, the meaning of sacrifice also changed.

Keeping the gods satisfied

Ancestor gods who practised a family/kin-based morality demanded attention congruent with their status if they were not to become vengeful. Such capricious beings had to be cajoled and flattered by their human descendents. If offended, they could become dangerous unless propitiated

¹⁰ In Mesoamerica where divine-human relations were characterised by an unceasing and relentless indebtedness, humans must return their own "earth-fed flesh and blood to the earth" in daily token offerings or in larger sacrifices (Clendinnen 1991:183,184).

with offerings (Radin 1957:223). Human sacrifices were required to propitiate gods in some ancient Near Eastern cultures as in Mesoamerica. The Aztec war god, Huitzilopochtli, who was reborn from the Earth as the blood-stained Sun God, could continue his diurnal cycle only if supplied with pulsating human hearts.¹¹ Young warriors, in turn, pledged themselves to Huitzilopochtli's service by "eating his flesh" (made from sacred dough) (Clendinnen 1991:22-28, 194; see also Bergmann 1992).¹²

In hierarchical and highly centralised societies, the gods became independent and self-sufficient, detached from the organic world of fertility, growth and decay, and requiring no relationship of mutuality with humans. Gods who had achieved immortality did not require food or any other sustenance. Humans were now dependent on the gods, and had to adopt an appropriate attitude of humility as they petitioned the gods to supply their needs.

Redemption by a blood sacrifice

The gods also appropriated all goodness and wisdom to themselves, leaving humans bereft of value and grace. Humans were unworthy sinners who could not look upon the face of a holy god and live. They must come before their god with a contrite and penitent heart, offering sacrifices for sin and pleading for mercy and forgiveness. This was the situation in the Jerusalem Temple traditions particularly after the catastrophic fall of the northern kingdom (Israel) to Assyria in 721 BC and the consequent influx of northern refugees into Jerusalem (Bloch-Smith

¹¹ According to Sahlin (1978:47), Aztec sacrifice involved the principle that "the flowing of blood [was] equivalent to the motion of the world".

¹² Tannahill (1975:20-26) maintains that in agricultural societies, human sacrifice always preceded animal sacrifice, and that in the ancient Near East it was not until the first millennium BC that animal sacrifice was substituted for human sacrifice.

1992:131).

Aboriginal perspectives

For Aboriginal people in Halls Creek, blood is a carrier of life-force which diffuses through a person's body radiating life and energy. It is a non-renewable resource that is recycled between generations. Blood is also infused with the qualities and potencies of a person. During initiation ceremonies novices drink the blood of ritually experienced men in order to imbibe their qualities and strength.¹³ Blood is a medium of exchange between the living and the dead and between different life-forms. In "increase" ceremonies, a kinsman pours blood from his arm vein on to a representation (manifestation) of his totemic ancestor to facilitate the regeneration of the totemic species (Berndt and Berndt 1943:40,49; Elkin 1951:xx; Strehlow 1970:279-280; Tonkinson 1991:117). When the species is plentiful and is killed for food, the hunters drink some of the animal's blood to give them strength (Roheim 1974:38).

The blood that men manipulate is, at its source, women's menstrual blood. New bodies of flesh and bone are built up out of the progenitors' semen and blood (Meggitt 1962:272). In a number of Yolngu cosmologies, men are believed to contribute semen, bone and spirit to the growing foetus while women's contribution is blood, milk and flesh (Williams 1986:50; Berndt and Berndt 1944:233; Peterson 1972:17-18). Blood is particularly potent and dangerous - in Arrernte cosmology, it is a source of life that originates in and flows like springwater from the ancestor's

¹³ During ordeals undergone by Gadjeri initiates in Central Australia-East Kimberley, "a guardian will pierce his own arm vein and spurt blood on the boy's head to revive him, or will give him the blood to drink. If elder brothers of the lad are in the party, they too may donate blood". (Meggitt 1966:65)

uterus (see Strehlow 1970:513-516).¹⁴ In discussions on the Gunabibi ceremony in northeast Arnhem Land, Berndt's (1951) informant states that

everything must come from the Mother's uterus. That is how we came in the Dreaming; and people still continue to come in that way... really we have been stealing what belongs to them (the women), for it is mostly all woman's business... men have nothing to do really, except copulate, it belongs to the women... all the Dreaming business came out of women - everything. (Berndt 1951:39,55)

Menstrual blood is translated colloquially in northeast Arnhem Land as "spring blood" and menstruating women are known, in translation, as "spring women" (Berndt 1951:27). Women in East Kimberley refer to their menstrual period as *daragu* ("secret-sacred"). Berndt (1965:274) also mentions that women in eastern Arnhem Land refer to their menstrual blood as *mardayin* ("sacred"). However, although there is believed to be a natural continuity between ancestral women's blood and human female blood,¹⁵ men have created an artificial discontinuity by appropriating ancestral blood and releasing it to women only under conditions controlled by themselves.¹⁶ Women may have menstrual blood but men have the power words and ritual actions (obtained by stealth) to endow human blood with ancestral potency. Men have made human females dependent on male ritual for their human fecundity.

¹⁴ An Arnernte Dreaming story portrays the Tjilpa ancestors camping at a place called Ulir-ulira, which means "where blood flows like a river" (Gill 1998:253).

¹⁵ When a girl has her first menses, she is put inside a house. She is supposed to remain in one place and move with the aid of digging sticks as crutches. This represents the myth of the two old women who made the present world. (Warner 1958:64)

¹⁶ The extent of this control is debated by anthropologists and contested by Aboriginal women themselves (see Bell 1983, Watson 1996).

In ritual, men transform their own human blood (which originally came from the ancestral women's uterus) into ancestral blood before re-enacting the life-generating journeys and activities of the ancestors. In exclusive male blood-letting ceremonies, an arm vein is punctured and the blood flows like women's menstrual blood. As it flows, power words are sung over it (Morphy 1991:189; Warner 1958:264-268). In Central Australia, blood in flow, impregnated by power words, becomes *guruwari* (ancestral life-force) (Meggitt 1962:65).

In ceremony, men drink this blood to make themselves strong. Berndt and Berndt (1943:40) state that the ancestral blood flows through the man's body, making him glow. They also apply it externally to their bodies. When Gunabibi initiands are taken to the men's law place, "they are painted with red-ochre and arm-blood, which represent the blood of the Wauwalak [Sisters]" (Berndt 1951:38). In ritual, they become the Two Sisters, re-enacting and recreating the power of their life-generating activities. Within the (inside) context of men's ceremonial practice, what is most powerful and life-giving is female (Morphy 1991:92,97; Williams 1986:50-51).

The initiands (the Two Sisters) are swallowed by Yulunggur, the Snake, and are held in his belly (symbolised by ritual seclusion lasting two weeks to two months) (Berndt 1951:37). At the climax of the Gunabibi ceremony, the initiands are placed inside a symbolic Wauwalak [Wawilak] uterus which is inseminated by Yulunggur. The Sisters are also swallowed by Yulunggur. By incorporating the menstruating and child-bearing Sisters into his body, the Snake may be arrogating their reproductive powers to himself. At their ritual rebirth, in the presence of women, the blood-covered novices emerge

from a tunnel of legs formed by the initiated males (Hiatt 1971:86; 1975:146-150).

In ritual, men appropriate ancestral women's blood to strengthen their bodies and arrogate to themselves its life-generating powers. Women may have their own menstrual blood, but men have access to the original procreative powers of the ancestral women which are used to regenerate both country and people. Ancestral blood is also used in the creation of paintings which are manipulated ritually to reincorporate and transmit the life-force of ancestral beings (Morphy 1991:189).

Jesus' blood

Jesus' death was interpreted by New Testament authors in terms of the Hebrew sacrificial system. Jewish sacrifices were based on a relationship between a hierarchised, self-sufficient and holy God and devalued, dependent and sinful human beings. The situation was a juridical one. Humans have broken the law and Divine justice must be satisfied. Although Divine justice appears to be based on a city-state/kingdom model (the king, whose very being embodies justice, rules as an impartial judge and has the authority to punish or pardon the wrong-doer), underneath lurks a family/kin-based morality, that of blood revenge. Only when God's honour has been avenged by loss of life (in this case by a substitutionary sacrifice) is forgiveness and reconciliation possible.

Medieval Europeans interpreted Jesus' blood within the framework of an agricultural spirituality. Theirs was a persistently organic outlook which saw humans in living and vital connection with the world around them.

Blood was a carrier of life-force, and Christ's blood, "coursing through his veins, and leaping from his wounded side", was perceived as a food which could be incorporated into the Christian's body. In medieval physiological theory, women's menstrual blood was processed into milk to feed the young. Medieval Christians had lactation visions in which Christ's life-blood flowed from his breasts to feed and nourish humanity into new life (Bynum 1989:65,185).

Aboriginal people in Halls Creek also conceive of Jesus' blood in organic and holistic terms rather than in terms of a juridical and punitive sacrificial system. Aboriginal concerns with flow/blockage and strength/weakness are revealed in their appropriation of Jesus' blood. People get rubbish blood from drinking grog. Drink turns the blood black (MJ). Black is the colour of sin.¹⁷ The blood of sinners is black and viscous with a tendency to coagulate.¹⁸ This is a dangerous state as it can cause blockage to the healthy flow of life-forces through the body. Jesus' blood is like a blood transfusion that flushes out the bad blood and infuses the body with good (that is, clean) blood.

Salvation (of one's individuated soul) by Jesus' death on the cross is de-emphasized by Aboriginal people in Halls Creek. Aboriginal Christians (particularly those in their forties and over) have not appropriated the idea of redemption by a blood sacrifice. One will get to heaven simply because one is "following the way". Requirements for Jesus' blood (by Christians and sinners alike) are for regenerative rather than salvific purposes.¹⁹ There are a large number of "sinners" in Halls Creek who

¹⁷ See section titled **Colour Symbolism** in this chapter.

¹⁸ Douglas (1966:38) drawing on Sartre's (1943) work, discusses the aberrant nature of viscosity. The viscous is neither solid nor fluid. "It is unstable, but it does not flow ... Its [cloying] stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech".

¹⁹ Although women are not denied access to Jesus' blood in Christian rituals, they are

have an understood (though irregularly utilised) connection with the AOG church (and a smaller number connected with the UAM) because of their close kin ties to church-goers. These connections may be activated at times of crisis or stress such as illness and death. It is also these "sinners" who swell the ranks of the "saved" during times of revival in the church. Christian "revivals" in Halls Creek are periodically reported in missionary newsletters, but continuing church attendance of these newly "saved" is rare.

It is not only sinners who need Jesus' blood. Christians are in constant need of the healing and strengthening blood of Christ. Colonised bodies are weakened and depleted by the vicissitudes of daily life in towns such as Halls Creek. The constant, excessive and often contradictory demands of family and bureaucratic institutions weakens people's life-force. Illness and misfortune drains people of blood, leaving them dried and parched like a dry riverbed. The blood of Jesus is strong and fructifying, building up bodies and increasing mental and emotional strength, enabling Christians to hold their families together and to create ties of harmony rather than enmity between family groups. Christians infused with the blood of Christ will be happy, friendly, hospitable and kind to strangers, eschewing jealousy, hatred and violence.²⁰

believed by Aboriginal men to be less powerful and less able to engage with strong spiritual powers than themselves (see Chapter 6).

²⁰ As discussed in Chapter 4, Protestant Aboriginal Christians consider fighting to be a sin, attributable to Satan's estrangement from God and his continuing malign influence on earth. People who engage in fighting today are "following the Devil's way". Christian parents admonish their children thus:

You can't fighting. You Christian now. You bin take that Jesus' blood.
(GC)

Jesus' blood is infused with the Christian qualities of peace, goodness, kindness, love, mercy and forgiveness.

The Christian body

The sinner body is:

Properly dirty, filthy and drinking all the time. You gotta feel hot la your body, no-good la binji. Sick one all the time. You got the stinking blood. Real breakdown. And swearing, murdering and fight. (JC)

The "Christian body" in Halls Creek is constructed in opposition to the "sinner body". The sinner body is the body that people had during "Devil time", and that many Aboriginal people in Halls Creek still have today. The colonised body shares features with the sinner body which is to be expected as both lands and bodies were colonised by Satan. The colonised body is weak and depleted. The sinner body is lazy and tired, frequently dirty, clothed in rags, regularly intoxicated, and constantly sick.

The Christian body, on the other hand, is described in terms used to depict health and vitality: fresh, clean, lively, light, shiny, cool and strong.

You're going to feel lovely and light and cold everywhere. Lord make you clean. Holy Spirit make you strong inside. You can't feel sick. All the time fresh. Happy all the time in your heart. (JC)

A *mabarn* man's body, if it is to function effectively as a conduit for healing life-forces, must always be clean. The healer keeps his body clean by ritual practices and dietary restrictions (see Chapter 1).²¹ The Christian body is also a conduit for life-forces (in this case for Christian life-forces). Jesus' blood travels around the body cleansing and strengthening it. Holy Spirit power is like spring water percolating through one's body, radiating

²¹ In East Kimberley, *mabarn* healers also use snakes for this purpose (see section titled *Sickness and Healing* in Chapter 6).

life and energy. Holy Communion wine washes the sin out of one's blood. The Christian body is clean and strong and invulnerable to unknown and potentially dangerous forces. In heaven, the Christian will have a new body, and a shining face, like Jesus. Sinners in hell, however, will be unable to shed their old, diseased, sinful bodies.

The surface of the Christian body is clean and properly clothed. When a person returns to "God's way" after having backslidden for some time, one of the first things they must attend to is assembling a collection of clothes suitable for church. For women, church clothes tend to be full-length (shoulder to knee) dresses, which distinguishes them from dancing clothes. Standard dancing clothes (that is, clothes required for dancing corroborees) are skirt, and a T-shirt which can be easily removed, allowing the participants' breasts and upper arms to be painted and displayed. (See Berndt 1950:77-85 and Munn 1973:98-112 for illustrations of women's ceremonial body painting.)²²

The surface of the Christian body is also strictly gendered in the AOG church. Women wear dresses or skirts and men wear trousers. A young woman who wore jeans on stage while singing with the women's group, was approached by the principle pastor and told not to present herself on stage in trousers again. Her response was to leave the AOG church and return to a "sinner" lifestyle, that is, drinking, swearing and fighting. Protestant women's hairstyles also distinguish them from the Catholic mob and from women who come from the outlying communities. Their

²² If Aboriginal women in East Kimberley wish to emphasize that their basic orientation in values is Aboriginal, not white, they will say (among other things), "I wear skirt and T-shirt, not dress". Women who travel frequently to traditional ceremonies in the Kimberley and elsewhere in Australia will have in their possession both "*gardiya* dresses" (for use when travelling in *gardiya* domains) and Aboriginal dancing clothes.

hair is allowed to grow long and sleek, and may be pinned up in a European style. Catholic women's hair is invariably cropped short because of traditional requirements for human hair at various stages of people's lives.

In heaven, the Christian body will be clothed in a long white gown, like Jesus, while the sinners in hell will be naked. For some Christians, *mamu/juwarri* (spirits of the dead) are always naked, which is evidence of their wild, uncivilised status. For others, however, *mamu* can be either naked or clothed. One way of telling whether *mamu* have good or bad intentions towards the living is whether they come to them clothed or not. Jabia Crow's mother-in-law (deceased) would come to her son wearing a long white dress and looking just like an angel. For this first generation of proselytised Aborigines, the distinction between God (and his angels) and the Devil (and his *mamu/juwarri* followers) was not at all clear.

Life-forces

In the past, both *birlirr* and *juwarri*, ancestral life-forces, infused the body with energising and motivating power. *Birlirr* could be thought of as a visceral life-force, associated with the breath, body pulsation, the flow of blood and other bodily fluids, and the tumultuous emotions (causing fluctuation in breath and heart beat). *Juwarri* could be glossed as a motile life-force associated with motivation, muscular power, bodily grace and endurance. It can appear externally to its body as a shadow or reflection during a person's life, and as a walking ghost or shade after his death. It can appear to other humans as a memory-image or dream-image. It is endowed with intentionality and will, and in its external state, it can

assume the form of an animal or other life-form.

The early UAM missionaries to Halls Creek who recognised only two (mutually opposed) spiritual powers in the world, sought indigenous words for “good spirit” and “evil spirit” in order to commence Bible translation. Because it was not known in traditional narratives to harm humans, *birlirr* became a good spirit or angel. *Juwarri*’s tendency towards capricious and at times malicious behaviour, particularly in its immediate postmortem state, earned it its translation as evil spirit or devil (that is, one of Satan’s demons).²³

²³ Current Aboriginal-English dictionaries published by the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Darwin and the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs continue to make these distinctions. Richards and Hudson’s *Walmajarri-English Dictionary* (1990) contains the following entries:

kukurr	name of a spirit that can take different forms,
kunamany	e.g. dog, crow, woman; evil spirit; ghost; devil.
kunaturrun	Related to the southern areas, said to be
mamu	nocturnal and feared (p 94)
piriturr	spirit; essence; central part; kernel; fleshy part
pilyurr	of fruit. Used to refer to the kernel of a seed,
pirlirr	centre of a damper, red flesh of watermelon and
kamiji	spirit of a person.
kurruum	
Pirlurr Ngarpukurajangka	Holy Spirit
Kurruum Yara	(p 236)

Hansen’s *Pintupi/Luritja Dictionary* (1992) contains this entry:

mamu	evil spirit; Satan; traditionally this evil spirit lives in shady and dark places ever seeking an opportunity to harm humans; also used of the biblical devil or his associates; see mamuku mayutju, kutatji, kurruwalpa, nyampu tarrkatjarra, tjangara, tjuntamutu, malpu, kukurpa, nguwa, pangkalangu (p 53)
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At the Catholic Pentecost celebrations held (to commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit) at Yaruman in 1991, the hosts wore T-shirts inscribed with the words:

Birlirr ngawiwu yaruman (translated as “Spirit of the Father [has come to] Yaruman”).

While it is well known and obvious that the local spirits (family spirits/ helping spirits/ guiding spirits) of one region will be the peripheral spirits (stranger spirits/enemy spirits/monsters) of a more distant region, to translate peripheral

Aboriginal people who received UAM missionary tuition were presented with a history of the world in which there were two main protagonists, God and the Devil. People who strongly associated with the UAM (firstly at the Fitzroy Crossing Mission and later in the town of Halls Creek), particularly those who were assisting with Bible translation, and who now interpreted *juwarri* as an evil spirit, could no longer have a *juwarri* power living in their body.

They bin have a *juwarri* inside them [in the early days]. They [the old people] bin born gotta *juwarri*. And he help all the people to grow up and live. (AS)

I got no *juwarri*. Devil don't come out la me [i.e. out of my body]. Witchdoctor gotta *juwarri* inside him. If you not a believer, you gotta *juwarri* in your heart. Might be you drinking. *Juwarri* got your control. Boss of you. (GD)

Birlirr (translated by UAM missionaries as "good spirit") was acceptable to some Aboriginal Christians as a life-force within the human body:

Birlirr when the person is living. *Birlirr* when they're breathing inside. We gotta *jiluwa* [a network of blood vessels]. *Birlirr* comes through the *jiluwa*. *Birlirr* come la *giningi* [respiratory/cardiovascular organs]. *Birlirr* is boss for the *jiluwa*. We gotta blood. When we feel im like that [i.e. feeling the pulse], well he work. (MJ)

Birlirr, that's a good spirit, not a worldly spirit. *Juwarri*, that's the worldly spirit, for snake and dancing and everything. They [the early days people] gotta black spirit. Wild living spirit. I gotta *birlirr* for Jesus. (AS)

When the Christian dies, their *birlirr* will go to heaven to be with God.

For other UAM Christians, particularly those who were children and young adults at Fitzroy Crossing Mission, *birlirr* has too many traditional associations to be acceptable, and therefore must be renounced.

When they come Christian, they don't think about *birlirr*. They chuck it all away. Only the Lord is in their hearts. This old law thing chuck im away. They don't carry im anymore.
(HS)

For these Christians, what goes to heaven at death is not *juwarri* or *birlirr* (ancestral life-forces) but one's heart or *giningi* (respiratory/cardiovascular organs associated with emotions and volition).

Heart versus binji (*as the site of Christian emotions and spiritual power*)

To say 'I love you', they [Nyulnyul speakers at Beagle Bay Mission] say literally, 'I give you my stomach', or 'I give you my breath'. They laughed at me when I told them it would be better to say, 'I give you my heart'. (Father Alphonse Tachon 1891, quoted in Zacker 1994:32).

Traditionally, *munda* (diaphragm/stomach area) was seen as a centre or resting place for the body's ancestral life-forces and emotions/volition. The *munda* (binji in Aboriginal English) is used as a metaphor to describe one's emotional-bodily interaction with the world around one. For example, your binji is hot when you are angry and spoiling for a fight. When you have "squared up" the trouble and are satisfied and calming down, your binji will be cool or cold. While travelling through, or staying in, a different (foreign) country, your binji is closed - you are apprehensive, watchful, on edge. However, in your own country surrounded by family and friends, your binji is open - you are feeling relaxed and expansive. To be "good binji" is to be happy. Love spells are performed to "turn [a person's] binji to you". In a trusting relationship, my

"binji is close" to yours.

If someone is "holding you in his binji", that is, thinking about you with focussed concentration, whether in a jealous/possessive or revengeful way, strength will flow out of your body, leaving you in a weakened state. In this condition, you are vulnerable to sickness, accidents or other misfortune. Knowledge, which is talked into a person, enters the body through the ears and is held in one's binji. Pondering, ruminating and decision-making takes place in the binji. To have "too many binji" is to be indecisive and ineffectual. *Liyan* (intuition, premonition), while felt in many parts of the body, is located principally in the binji.

When missionaries came to the Kimberley, they talked about hearts and minds, not about binji. The separation of cognition/volition from emotions, and their location in different parts of the body, is a legacy of hellenism. In the Homeric epics, thinking and feeling were not separated (Onians 1954:13). However, Plato's soul was a city-state soul. The hierarchisation of the body politic and the cosmos in Mediterranean societies (legitimised and naturalised by metaphorical transubstantiation, that is, the transfer of hierarchically ordered body parts from corporeal to incorporeal bodies) was reincorporated into the human body as a three-tiered soul.

The rational part of the soul which was immortal, incorporeal and engaged in contemplative practices, was uncontaminated by bodily desires and appetites, and linked closely to the practice of civic virtues. It was believed to correspond to the aristocracy of the city-state whose function is to rule the lower orders. The spirited part of the soul which was mortal and dominated by the passions, was analogous to the military class of the

city-state. The appetitive part of the soul was bodily and corresponded to the agricultural labourers of the city-state (Lyle 1990:31, Prior 1991:131). Over time, the rational part of the soul became located in the head and the spirited part in the heart. The appetitive part ceased to exist (Onians 1954:180).

The missionaries taught that when you become a Christian, Jesus (both as sacrificial Lamb and as King of the World) comes to live in your heart. The heart is the seat of one's affections, desires, sympathies and motivations. Jesus' blood cleanses the heart of sin so that Jesus the King can enter and be ruler of the human heart. Holy Spirit power flows into the human heart as a purifying and empowering force. And the Christian emotions of love, joy, peace, gentleness and longsuffering spring forth from the heart into a world which is deprived of these gifts.

On the other hand, "traditional" (or local) emotions, deriving from a family/kin-based polity and morality, and associated with the *binji*, are condemned by Protestant missionaries as one's "sin nature". Jealousy, anger, grudge-holding and revenge are part of the old human nature which resulted from the Fall, and which can be overcome when the Christian allows Jesus (who has defeated Satan and sin) to be the ruler of their heart.

Since missionisation, the location and movement of life energies within the human body has become problematic for Aboriginal people. For some Christians the location of spirits is fairly straightforward:

If you're a Christian, Jesus is in your heart. If you're a non-Christian, *juwarri* is in your *binji*. (HS)

For other Christians, the *birlirr* as an energising force still moves around the body, but it has changed permanent residence. *Birlirr* (the good spirit) now resides in the heart, along with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Some people have divided human emotions into “traditional” and Christian, and locate them separately. “Traditional” emotions continue to spring forth from the binji while Christian emotions inhabit the heart. As stated by Jabia Crow:

You love with your heart. You feel happy with your binji.
(JC)

Intuitions and premonitions, sorcery and love spells, “negative” emotions (jealousy, fear and anger) and the desire to fight and take revenge, are associated with one’s binji. Christian love and joy radiate from the heart.

For other Christians, the binji and all its traditional associations must be denounced altogether:

When they come Christian they got nothing in their binji.
Only the Lord is in their hearts. (HS)

People who make a strong distinction between “God’s power” and “Devil’s power”, locate these powers separately in the human body:

Mabarn man [who is, by definition, a non-Christian] can’t carry all his [healing powers] in his heart. He’s got them in his binji. But power from God comes into the heart. (HS)

The binji is also devalued as a site for storing (and pondering over) knowledge:

[Christians] hear the word in their head. Then it goes to the heart. If they don't believe it in their heart [i.e. if they're not Christians], it goes down to the binji. They keep all the word and stories in their binji. Till they come Christian. Then it goes up to the heart. (HS)

Colour symbolism

The early missionaries to the Kimberley taught the gospel story with the *Wordless Book*, a little book with pages of different colours.²⁴ The black page represents the heart of the sinner before his encounter with Christ. The red page represents the blood of Christ that was shed for all sinners. And the white page represents the human heart cleansed of all sin.

Aboriginal people with a fairly intensive missionary education have internalised this colour symbolism:

If you're black inside, that mean you're not right inside la heart. Sin he look black. Blood is black inside. If you're white inside, you're clean now. (MJ)

We gotta same blood like Jesus. Not black blood. White blood. We gotta clean blood. Like Jesus. Jesus is the white. (MJ)

Not all Aboriginal Christians have internalised this black/white symbolism. A visiting Maori pastor was preaching in the AOG church. He said:

My wife is a white woman. I don't hold that against her. My wife was talking to a black woman. She said, 'I may have a white skin but I was born with a black heart'.

²⁴ This book is also mentioned in M. Morgan's (1986), *A Drop in a Bucket*, a history of the UAM mission at Mt. Margaret, Western Australia, p 80.

The gospel message on this occasion fell on different ears:

That pastor bin tell them *gardiya* [the AOG leadership] that black, white and brindle can all go together [including intermarriage]. White woman and black man too. No matter different colour [on the outside]. We are all the same inside. (LP)

God, unlike the AOG missionaries, is quite agreeable to black men marrying white women, as a way to “square up” the moral imbalances (that is, white men taking all the black women) that occurred during “Devil time”.²⁵

Sin

The Judaeo-Christian notion of sin is predicated on the existence of a hierarchised and holy Supreme Being, in whose presence humans feel abased and unworthy. Sin is a hierarchical concept - it is the expression of independence on the part of humans (mere creatures) from their Creator. It is the refusal to stay in one's rightful place of dependence upon, and submission to, a transcendent God.

However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, Aboriginal spirituality (even when Christianised) does not tend to be hierarchical, and Aboriginal people have not developed a notion of perfectibility. Their notion of sin is

²⁵ Grant Ngabidj expresses similar sentiments in his life story, recorded by Bruce Shaw:

[Black men and white men] do not want much to do with each other because the white man wants the black girl. Half of them are married with black girls now. I ask myself, if white men marry black women why blackfellers do not marry, make a girlfriend of a white lady? I believe they do in Darwin and I reckon that is a good thing. I do not know why they do not do it here ... white men can marry black women but never the other way round; I don't know why. That would make it square wouldn't it? (Ngabidj, in Shaw 1981:147).

something like "breaking the law", for which one would expect to be sanctioned in some way. Aborigines also have not developed an individualistic notion of sin, such that one would feel intense guilt, and fear that one's (unique) soul will be damned forever. Sin is "making trouble" for other people such as one's boss or one's family, from whom one would expect retaliation of some kind. For the Christian, sinning against God is failing to "follow his way".

There are degrees of rightness and wrongness. For example, one can be "a little bit sinner" by breaking one of the Ten Commandments. Nearly all the Biblical characters were "a little bit sinner" at some point in their lives. "Half-Christians" are those who habitually sin, that is, who habitually fail to "follow God's way". Such people can expect to be frequently sick during their lives and will not reach heaven at death.

Sin, which adheres in sinful practices, can enter the human body during such practices, for example, smoking and drinking will turn the blood black. This will cause the body to be weak and diseased. The "sinner body", as previously described, is dirty, sick, badly clothed and frequently intoxicated. Jesus' blood, taken at Holy Communion, can wash the sin out of one's blood, leaving one fresh and clean.

Repentance-Forgiveness

Just as sin, for Aboriginal people, is not seen in terms of a hierarchical spirituality, so the remedies for sin do not derive from hierarchical models of jurisprudence. The repentance-forgiveness mechanism of reconciliation emerged within a particular historical and political milieu, that of the city-state kingdom, and is a product of royal jurisprudence. The

justice system is adversarial rather than mediatory, and requires the presence of an impartial judge (normally the king) who has the authority to punish or pardon the offender.

The king's punishment, while based on hierarchical models of jurisprudence, and city-state values of impartiality and universal justice, is shown by Foucault (1975:48) to be an act of sovereign vengeance against those who, in breaking the laws of the kingdom, have offended against the person of the king himself. The king's pardon, like his punishment, is a demonstration of monarchical power. Those in a position of strength can afford to adopt an attitude of benevolence towards the weak. The ancient Near Eastern "compassion ethic" is a product of the structural inequality of humans in city-state societies (Theissen 1992:277). The kingly virtues of compassion, grace, mercy and forgiveness are products of ethically asymmetrical relationships. In order to receive the king's pardon, the offender must demonstrate remorse and repentance, which are acts of self-humiliation and abasement.

Forgiveness, a hierarchical and ethically asymmetrical concept, became "democratised" in republican Athens. There was no longer a king to grant a royal pardon. Athenian juries and oligarchic councils appropriated the kingly qualities of "compassion, forgiveness and kindness" (Dover 1974:83). Pardon for crimes committed without malicious intent could be granted by the victim's male relatives (MacDowell 1978:120).

Aboriginal models of reconciliation do not derive from city-state polities (whether monarchical or republican). Their methods of dispute resolution were developed within a family/kin-based polity and are informed by an ethic of reciprocity. Aboriginal people talk about "squaring up" the trouble

by retaliation or reparation in order to restore to interfamily relationships a moral equilibrium. After appropriate reparation has been carried out, antagonists are urged to "friend up again" and "be mates".

An adversarial system of dispute resolution with a win/lose outcome is not appropriate to Aboriginal philosophies of life. There is no situation in which one party could be totally innocent and the other party totally culpable. As Bourdieu, writing of dispute settlement in Mediterranean-North African cultures, states:

... a man, even when he makes honourable amends, cannot be absolutely wrong, and in any case cannot attribute all wrongs to himself, and so is always a little in the right just as the other is always a little in the wrong ... [Defendants] accuse and find fault with the party from whom pardon has been sought, so that a balance may be restored and that the supplicating party may avoid complete humiliation (Bourdieu 1965:195,196).

Likewise, in eastern Arnhem Land disputes, Williams (1987) finds that Yolngu do not

judge [offenders] in absolute terms... Rather they assume that human beings are capable of being agents of both good and bad actions and in the course of a lifetime a person can reasonably be expected to be the agent of acts of both good and bad outcomes. (Williams 1987:105)

These legal philosophies help to clarify Halls Creek people's reference to themselves as "a little bit sinner" or as a "half-Christian".

In the Western Desert, disputes and the airing of grievances take place "in an atmosphere of great public drama and menace, so that honour is seen to be satisfied" while actual physical violence is minimised. Interested third parties, while attempting to contain and regularise

(ritualise) the violence, work to "ensure that both parties obtain a measure of satisfaction" from the dispute settlement (Tonkinson 1991:154-156).

The repentance-forgiveness mechanism of reconciliation adopted by hellenistic Mediterranean religions as a model for conciliation between man and God is not appropriated by most Aboriginal Christians. When Aboriginal Christians sin, that is, fail to "follow God's way", they expect some form of retribution. For example, they expect that they (or a relative) will get sick. Their own children are especially vulnerable in these situations. Depending on the severity of the sin (and Aboriginal people grade sins differently from white evangelical missionaries as previously discussed), they avoid attending church, or they attend church but avoid going forward to the altar as they cannot reasonably ask for God's help, healing or protection when they are not following his way. In order to rectify the situation between themselves and God, they will "try their best to follow God's way" (GD). Then they can participate fully in church services and receive God's blessing and the washing away of their sins (by participating in Holy Communion).

Rewards and Punishments

In ancient Mediterranean cultures, retaliation or punishment by ancestors or gods took place in the temporal world. Moral dissymmetries between family groups needed to be rectified at the time they occurred for life to proceed with equanimity. If a man of many misdemeanours died without retribution, thoughts of him suffering in another life-world did not satisfy his victims' need for balanced reciprocity in this world. His family must suffer here and now. The Hebrew Bible gives evidence of a system of

graded penalties for offences committed and rewards for obedience, but in the pre-exilic literature there is no mention of rewards and punishments after death (Epstein 1959:29; Witherington 1994:18).

In later periods (that is, at around 600 BC), deferred punishment in an afterworld was emphasized. This coincided with the movement from collective to individual moral liability and retribution. A frequently expressed maxim at the time of Plato was:

If one suffers what he himself did, it is true justice.
(Nichomachean Ethics 1132b, quoted in Himmelfarb
1983:76).

Measure-for-measure punishments to be metered out in an afterlife were elaborated in grotesque detail in hellenistic writings (Himmelfarb 1983:82-85).

Aboriginal people in Halls Creek, motivated by a strong ethic of reciprocity, expect retaliation or punishment in this world. The Old Testament stories of revenge and retribution make good moral sense to them. The AOG missionaries frequently preach from the Old Testament using the Israelites in the wilderness as an analogy of AOG Christians in Halls Creek. The Israelites in the wilderness were stubborn, hard-hearted, wilful idolators, who were continually being led astray by foreign gods and foreign religions. In the Old Testament people were punished with plagues, famines, floods, wars, exile and slavery.

However, the Apocalyptic Judgement Day with its graphic courtroom drama and spectacular displays of monarchical power, has also captured Aboriginal people's imaginations. Lock-up, court and gaol have become

part of Halls Creek Aborigines' everyday reality. Aboriginal people frequently use the terminology of court proceedings in their everyday speech. Court and gaol has made its way into Aboriginal ceremonial life. At the Kununurra women's celebrations in 1989, women who absconded from camp after the ceremonies had begun and got drunk in town were "punished" on the ceremonial ground by being made to dance a "court dance" and "prisoners' dance". Aboriginal descriptions of hell rival those of hellenistic Mediterranean writers.

At the End of the World, on Judgement Day:

All the devil [spirits of the dead] gotta be there now. And that one he cast out of heaven, he'll be right there with his fork and his mob. And hellfire will be wide open... Hot and burning and smell. He gotta judge them first. "Are you guilty, not guilty? You guilty. You not true. You never worship God. You never take notice of God. You was real lazy and you was tired. You was muck up with the Devil". (AS)

Angel just spin you from top now. You'll fall right down the bottom in the fire. You'll be there all year round. You'll never come out. There's no sleep, nowhere to camp, and nowhere to sit, have a rest. Everything crawling there, worms and all. You gotta be walking all day, all night. (LP)

You'll be looking for water. You'll open the tap. It's black water. And dirty beef, gotta maggots. Biggest hellfire will be burning. You can't find a shade. And that *mamu* king standing up gotta biggest fork. He'll push you into the boiling water. You better run. Nother lot devil chasing you everywhere gotta knife or axe. You'll never sleep down there. You can't find a decent place [to rest]. (GC)²⁶

²⁶ For Halls Creek Aboriginal people (contra missionary teaching), hell is currently uninhabited. Christian spirits go to heaven at death, and non-Christian spirits (when not engaging in reincarnation) stay around on the earth awaiting the Second Coming and the Day of Judgement.

According to Maddy Jarra, nobody will go to hell. On Judgement Day Jesus will take everybody with him to heaven because he loves all sinners:

They [sinners] still go to heaven. Jesus never die for all the good people. He bin die for all the wrong what people do. They go to heaven now. They

Heaven versus reincarnation

Traditionally, a new *juwarri*,²⁷ once it had "settled down" and stopped feeling vengeful towards the living, would go and live in the *juwarri* place,²⁸ only coming back to its relatives when it was needed. At the *juwarri* place, spirits of the dead lived "normal" human lives, travelling, devising corroborees, marrying and having children. When the *juwarri* became tired of living as ghosts and had decided that their families could manage without them, they became eager to return to the human world. To do this they had to enter the body of a woman and, being nourished by her body, develop into a human being.²⁹

Juwarri come back into the human world (that is, the outside world), via the category of women they call "mother". If there are no satisfactory mothers within the "mother" category, they might look elsewhere for a mother. The *juwarri* transforms himself into his "totem" animal, which is his "true" (Dreaming) shape, is killed (often by his prospective father) and eaten by his prospective mother. This process is called *jarriny*.³⁰

go clean. All the [sinful] thing, behind they leave im. (MJ)

²⁷ The ghost of a newly deceased person.

²⁸ A place in the bush not visible to ordinary people except in dreams. *Mabarn* men may travel there.

²⁹ Kaberry states (of Gija people in the 1930s) that:

when the mourning has been completed and the first extremity of grief has passed, the relatives have little to fear from their own kin who are *djuari*. They keep a small piece of one of the bones or a lock of hair, and through this medium, the *djuari* are able to warn them of the approach of an enemy. The *djuari* also teach their kindred new corroborees, and instruct the person who wishes to become a *baramambin* or *baramambil* [clever man or woman] in his or her craft... Some of the *djuari* are reincarnated in the living: others continue to wander over the land and are a source of protection to their kindred. (Kaberry 1939:217,218)

³⁰ Bruce Shaw discusses reincarnation in East Kimberley in a postscript to Grant Ngabidj's life story:

We waited for the rebirth of Grant's spirit in the body of a future new infant. This principle of reincarnation, called *wibulirri* among the Miriwong and Gadjerong, is intrinsic to East Kimberley Aboriginal

Some *juwarri*, that is, the especially potent ones, choose to remain as *juwarri* for long periods rather than returning to human form, in order to empower *mabarn* men and do the work of healers. Others who decide not to come back as humans are suspected of having malevolent intentions towards the living. They tend to hide in dark places, especially on the peripheries of people's countries, and assume frightening guises in order to render humans witless and tractable.

Them *juwarri* what sit in the dark, he just like a bushranger. He don't come close up. He can't show himself. He real dangerous, murderer. He can kill person. (JC)

Instead of returning to the company of humans, they try to seduce humans into the company of *juwarri*.

Older Aboriginal Christians do not see a need to choose between heaven and reincarnation. Reincarnation must occur because the spirit never dies - it just keeps moving. All the people currently living today were alive in the Dreamtime in animal form and they use their animal form to return to the outside world. Heaven is merely the Christian "*juwarri* place", that is, the place to which Christian spirits go before they are reincarnated. After their spirit goes to heaven, God can send them back to be reincarnated.

Both European and Aboriginal spirits are reincarnated. In the early days especially, perhaps because of a scarcity of European women in the Kimberley, it was not uncommon for European spirits to choose

religion ... In the East Kimberley *wibulirri* appears to take place from six months to two years after a death ... The reborn person is recognised often by a physical feature or mannerism which characterised him/her in the earlier life. (Shaw 1981:155, 156)

Aboriginal mothers. It is believed that some present day mixed descent people in Halls Creek are the reincarnations of early days white people.

God sent Jesus to earth by reincarnation:

God bin send that Holy Spirit to Mary. He disappeared. He bin turn into baby. Just like an old witchdoctor. He gotta born. He was holy baby. Jesus his name. (JC)

Because Jesus was reincarnated, we have to be reincarnated too:

When they [i.e. Christians] die, they die and go up to heaven. And then the spirit come back. Like Jesus now. He's God's Son. Nobody never know how he bin come to Mary. He bin come *jarriny jarriny*. *Jarriny Jarriny* from Father. That's how we gotta go. Like Jesus when he bin come back. Just like a new baby. You can't be old person, old age now. You gotta be new person now. (MJ)

When a person is reincarnated, they can't remember their earlier life because Jesus washes their sins away:

I'm *jarrinyba* uncle. He was a bad man, my uncle. He used to kill person and fighting all the time. But I don't think about what I used to do [before]. When God sends kids to nother person, he wash the sin away from that baby. Jesus washes your brains out. You don't know what you used to do before. You're a new creation. (JC)

For middle-aged Aboriginal Christians with a Moola Bulla/Fitzroy Crossing mission education, reincarnation is a sin. It is following the *juwarri* line, that is, aligning oneself with the Devil's way. It is expressing independence from God, by deciding what to do with your own life.

If I was non-Christian, I should die and I go *jarriny* to any mother. They'll say, "Oh, this one old Dinimi's daughter. (S)he bin come *jarriny* now. Old Dinimi gotta look after im

now". But that's for olden day's life. The Devil was ruling all their life, because he's jealous. He doesn't want them to come to church. When you Christian, you can't come back *jarriny*. You'll go up la heaven and you'll never come back. (AS)

"Traditionally", it was the good kinsperson who came back to help his family in spirit form, and eventually to rejoin his family as a human being:

If you gotta loving mother, or loving father or sister, if you lose im [i.e. if he or she dies], he'll still come back for you in spirit. And he'll guide you where you go. He'll still watch you. He won't leave you. (GC)

Good people come back to born again. And some people go bad. They just live like that [i.e. like a *juwarri*]. Proper spirit, proper person, he go round looking for mother. He find im. Sometime he come back to his right parents, mother and father. Might be his sister might gettim, that spirit. (LP)

Today, however, it is only the sinners who come back to help their families and get themselves reincarnated. True Christians go straight to heaven and never come back:

Say for us fella, all the sinner. When we die, we die, get very weak. After that, we'll still be walking round here. We spirit will be walking round. You'll look for mother and father. And you'll come back to that mother one. That's *jarriny*. But if I turn to be a Christian, real Christian, and if I die ... I'll go up here la heaven. I'll say to my sons and daughters, "I don't know you". (GC)

In Israel, the notion that the dead do not know of or care for their descendants' welfare was a development of monarchy and empire, and the suppression of rural ancestral cults (Halpern 1991:72). In Halls Creek, it is a universal religion (Christianity), spiritual offspring of the universalising political systems of the ancient Near East, which is silencing the links

between the living and the dead.

For a younger generation of UAM Christians (in their 20s and 30s), the link has been severed:

They [the old people] say dead people come back to another mother. But I believe Christian way. I believe that when we die, our spirit can't come back alive again, walking round. You can't come back to another mother. Once you're dead, you're dead. Christian spirit goes to heaven. (LS)

Younger AOG Christians, however, who have not severed the link between the living and the dead, have given God a (colonial) role in reincarnation:

If that mother not looking after her kids, Lord can take that baby away, and give it to nother mother *jarrinyba*. (VM)

Sometimes, the Lord can take your baby away just to test you, that is, to test your loyalty to him:

If you twofella, husband and wife, got a baby, and you are going really strong for the Lord, the Lord might take your baby away [by death]. Just to test you. If twofella keep going really strong for the Lord [i.e. not "falling back" to the Devil's way], he'll give you that baby back again *jarrinyba*. (LN)

I am giving the last words of this chapter to Gabi Cousins, a woman in her early 50s, who spent her childhood and early adulthood at Moola Bulla government reserve, and who is today an ex-member of the AOG church. She has not been able to extricate herself from a drinking lifestyle because of family complications, and sees heaven and reincarnation as starkly contrasting destinations:

Say if I die, I'll never reach heaven. I'll never go up there because I know I'm a sinner. I'll just get up from bed ... my spirit will be walking around. Then I might look for mother and father. I know that I'm a *mamu*, see. (GC)

Summary

In this chapter I have looked at Aboriginal understandings and experiences of being Christian. It is here (particularly in the discussions of body, blood and spirit) that continuity in ideas between hunter-gatherer religions and world religions can most clearly be seen. Aboriginal experience of Christianity in Halls Creek is an embodied (but not an implaced) experience. Christianity, a heaven-based religion (at least in its conservative evangelical form) has not been able to address the problems of Aboriginal dispossession and dislocation. But Christ's potent body is available to all who come to him in their need.

Aboriginal experience of colonisation is a bodily depleting experience. In church the potent fragments of Christ's broken body can be appropriated for healing and strengthening purposes. His blood, bones and spirit are needed not only for healing bodies but for strengthening the life-force which spreads out from the body into the world through social and moral actions. Aboriginal experience of Christianisation can be bodily fructifying.

Experiences of church-going are discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

CHURCH-GOING

The politics of church affiliation

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Catholic and Protestant churches were enmeshed in sectarian rivalry in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, and this was reflected in Catholic/UAM mission relations in the East Kimberley. Aboriginal people understood the two mission churches to be jealous of each other in their efforts to create mobs. Today, all Aboriginal people in Halls Creek affiliate with one of the three churches, although often the only time this affiliation is evident is at times of death when funerals have to be arranged. Christmas and Easter festivals do not attract "nominal" churchgoers as they do in some European cultures.

The UAM probably has the largest affiliation (but not the largest church attendance) of Aboriginal people in Halls Creek. The reasons for this are historical. From the 1940s, itinerant UAM missionaries visited the stations on the country of Gija, West Jaru and Guniyan people who now live in Halls Creek. In 1955, when the Department of Native Welfare sold Moola Bulla government settlement, the UAM provided a home for the evicted Aboriginal inhabitants at Fitzroy Crossing Mission. Catholic adherence in Halls Creek is made up of people from stations in the far east of the Kimberley and on the borders of the southern desert regions, who now live in a number of small communities close to Halls Creek.

The AOG entered the Halls Creek region in 1982 as the UAM leadership was preparing to leave. They arrived with great fanfare as a Crusade team from North Queensland, to hold well advertised evangelistic meetings which were to feature miracles and healings. These meetings attracted in particular the Halls Creek reserve people who had been moving out of the cattle stations over a twenty year period but, as a result of Western Australian Government action, had been unable to obtain land and set up "independent" communities. They were losing their old people who had continued to inject "traditional" meaning into pastoral existence, and who had spent their last years in Halls Creek unsuccessfully negotiating with government bodies for communal living space on or near their old station homes. Without land or strong leadership, they felt ownerless and abandoned. They experienced colonisation as bodily depletion, intoxication and sickness.¹ The AOG missionaries offered what the Aboriginal reserve people lacked most: the power to live well.²

For Aboriginal people in Halls Creek, church mobs are like kin groups. In order to live well, one should align oneself with a strong group. The AOG church is seen by many Aborigines as a particularly strong and powerful group. This is evident from their strong leadership and large following. A strong group is one that can provide nurturance, protection, help in times of trouble and a measure of prestige for their followers.

¹ For Aboriginal feelings of ownerlessness and abandonment, see quotation from Elsa Numidi in section on *Kimberley history*, Chapter 3.

² Aboriginal people in Halls Creek, both Christians and sinners, say that Christians have a "better life" than sinners. A "better life" is defined here in terms of having enough food, clothes and shelter, and protection from injury and harm. The "sinner body" is dirty, hungry, clothed in rags, regularly intoxicated, frequently sick and always in danger of being harmed by the violence of others.

Rivalry among the three churches (today downplayed by the Catholic and UAM leadership) continues to be expressed by their Aboriginal adherents. Both AOG and UAM adherents have trouble fitting Catholics into a conservative evangelical Christian mould. The Catholics go two ways, that is, “God’s way” and “Devil’s way”. They openly practise evangelical Christianity’s catalogue of sins and continue to maintain a traditional religious life. Catholics will not go to heaven, at least in the short term. They will be reincarnated.

AOG Aborigines see the UAM as an early days church that has been superseded by the more powerful AOG. The UAM church is old and impotent. This is reflected in their inability to generate large followings. They cannot help people in times of trouble. They have no power, no miracles and no healing. UAM Christians are lazy and tired. They do not get up early in the morning to pray. In church they sit in plastic chairs staring at each other (instead of energetically flowing with the Holy Spirit). They do not bring sinners to church. They cannot speak up to *gardiya*. The UAM Bible has parts (about Pentecostalism and Holy Spirit power) missing from it. As a result, they are unable to track the story right through.³

The UAM Aborigines, in their turn, see the AOG congregation as a mob of sinners who worship Bro. Phillip instead of God. Bro. Phillip is seen as a kind of dictator. He wants to be the boss over everyone in Halls Creek. In his church he tries to control everyone’s lives. His practices are unbiblical.

³ These comparisons and judgements are very similar to comparisons made during the law season between different traditional ceremonial cycles. Spectatorship is not valued by Aboriginal people. Participation is important. However, the above judgements made of UAM Christians are not correct. They are part of a mythology developing in the AOG about non-Pentecostal churches.

Our [UAM] church is the narrow way. Not many people can go that way, Bro. Phillip way is the broad way. Too many people drinking, stealing, fighting. (JC)

He [Bro. Phillip] forces them to stand up [in church]. He forces them to come to the front. They get slain. They get up and let people knock them down senseless. You can't get healed like that. (LS)⁴

Falling down is not God's way. I think it must be hypnotising. Like "Salt Bush Bill". Bro. Phillip used to travel with the Dilarney side show.⁵ He learned to do hypnotism there. (HS)

However, despite their general disapproval of Pentecostalism, UAM adherents are sometimes attracted to the AOG because of its perceived potency. For example, a UAM adherent participated in an AOG healing service, and got married (in the UAM church) in an attempt to alleviate a prolonged and painful attack of gallstones.

During periods of relative calm and security, Aboriginal people are continually engaged in defining their particular church (and themselves) as different, especially as more true and correct (that is, more efficacious) than the other churches. However, during periods of crisis (for example, illness and death), family solidarity becomes more important than church affiliation and Aboriginal people de-emphasize the differences between the churches, claiming that "we all worship the same God".

⁴ See section titled *At the altar* in this chapter.

⁵ White entertainers and show people who toured throughout the Kimberley, often in conjunction with the annual horse races.

People also change church affiliation, temporarily or permanently. The majority of these changes in recent years have been away from the AOG to the UAM, or more rarely, to the Catholic church. Most of these have been because Bro. Phillip has offended people, in particular offending their sense of Aboriginality. Joni Moore, an East Jaru speaker who had both Catholic and UAM missionary influence as a child (on Flora Valley and Gordon Downs stations) joined the AOG church in Halls Creek as an adult. When she expressed interest in doing some paid work at the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, she was told by the principle AOG pastor, "Don't go there. That place is full of devils". Joni, who had been worried for some time that her own children were not learning Jaru, promptly left the AOG church, and sometime later joined the Catholic church.

Leadership and potency

Daniel [assistant pastor in the AOG] is just a working man.
Phillip is a big big boss. (LP)

The pastors in the AOG church give themselves various titles, taken from Biblical leadership roles. The pastors in general see themselves as priests of God who stand before the presence of God to intercede on behalf of the Halls Creek people. Bro. Phillip calls himself a prophet of God, one who proclaims God's message to the people. He has been annointed by the Holy Spirit for this task. This charism allows Phillip to claim authority over his congregation, and also a kind of omniscience. One cannot speak against the prophet of God. Bro. Phillip also refers to himself as an angel of God (after Acts 6:15).

For AOG Christians at Halls Creek, Bro. Phillip has the qualities of both a "big man" and a clever man. His status as a big man depends on the size of his following, as well as on personal qualities such as oratorical skills and the ability to provide a good life for his followers.⁶ The size of Bro. Phillip's following is frequently compared with the followings of the other churches in Halls Creek. At times when Phillip has lost his followers (particularly his leading men) to drink, there has been discussion not only on his status as a strong leader but on his bodily integrity. When Bro. Phillip is "losing all his boys", he and his fellow pastors become weak and ineffectual. At times of severe depletion in numbers, the truth of his church is also called into question.

AOG pastors, and in particular the principle pastor, are believed to have *mabarn*-like powers:

Bro. Phillip got the power. Miracle. Heal im sick. Raise im dead. All that lot [UAM people] reckon power from Satan. But 'es a strong power. (JW)

The pastors frequently claim that God gives them revelations about world events and about the specificities of life in Halls Creek. They are credited by Aboriginal Christians with the powers to "see" and "hear" events occurring at a distance (in the human world). They are also able

⁶ Williams' (1987) account of Aboriginal understandings of leadership cannot be bettered:

While leaders can expect those who acknowledge their authority to respond to their requests for help by "working" for them, they are also obliged to respond to requests from their followers for support. Yolngu expect [leaders] to be strong, powerful and dangerous (*madakarritj*) ... they should be physically vigorous, have forceful personalities and be capable of expressing this force... they should be persuasive orators capable of molding and articulating consensus decisions... they should travel widely meeting with heads of other groups and cementing or extending old ties. (Williams 1987:44)

to “see” the spirit world and access (or immobilise) its powers. According to Aboriginal people, early day missionaries knew that corroborees came from the Devil because they could “see” *mamu*-demons dancing in the shadows.

Relationship between Aborigines and pastors

In their attempts to negotiate the pastor/congregation divide, both missionaries and Aborigines have adopted relationship models with which they are familiar and which they deem to be appropriate to the situation. A military model (adopted by the European leadership) and a boss/worker model (adopted by Aboriginal people) produce different expectations among leaders and followers in Halls Creek.

Military model

In ancient Mesopotamia as elsewhere, the military model of social organisation with its hierarchical chains of command and obedience was incorporated into civilian life at an institutional level in order to control conquered peoples (Dudley 1991:52). Obedience became a crucial factor in the Yahweh-Israelite covenant relationship recorded in the Old Testament. Foucault (1975:146, 315) discusses the militarisation of civilian life in Western Europe. Benedictine monasteries and later, the Jesuits and other religious orders, adopted the military model with its disciplinary techniques into their religious, medical and educational organisations.

Tillich vividly describes the militarisation of both the public and private spheres of life in Lutheran (and Reformed) Germany before the First World War:

Lutheran paternalism made the father the undisputed head of the family, which included, in a minister's house, not only wife and children but also servants with various functions. The same spirit of discipline and authority dominated the public schools, which stood under the supervision of local and county clergy in their function as inspectors of schools. The administration was strictly bureaucratic, from the policeman in the street and the postal clerk behind the window, up through a hierarchy of officials, to the far-removed central authorities in Berlin - authorities as unapproachable as the "castle" in Kafka's novel. Each of these officials was strictly obedient to his superiors and strictly authoritative toward his subordinates and the public... Patriotism involved, above all, adherence to the King and his house. The existence of a parliament, democratic forces, socialist movements, and of a strong criticism of the Emperor and the Army did not affect the conservative Lutheran groups of the East among whom I lived. All these democratic elements were rejected, distortedly represented, and characterized as revolutionary, which meant criminal. (Tillich 1967:30,31)⁷

Military models have pyramidal power structures. Power of command is vested in the few at the top while the lower levels must respond with obedience and loyalty. Obedience, a military imperative, entered the discourses of religious philosophy and acquired the status of a religious (and moral) imperative. Vows of obedience became integral parts of the religious life. Submission to the will of a higher authority was believed to be a sign of true spirituality.

⁷ This militarisation of family and working life in conservative Protestant countries did not cease with the disillusionment of two world wars. It continued throughout my childhood and young adulthood.

The missionary, as priest and prophet, is a representative of God in the place of his ministry. God speaks through him to the congregation of believers. Surrender to the will (and to the discipline) of God's representative is surrender to the will of God. Missionaries' expectations of their followers, in Halls Creek as elsewhere, derives from this spiritualised military model.

AOG missionaries in Halls Creek are frequently frustrated with their Aboriginal adherents because of what they perceive as a lack of appropriate response in the pastor/congregation relationship. Bro. Phillip complains that AOG Christians exhibit "bad attitudes" towards their pastors. They don't submit themselves to the Word of God (and to the messenger of God). They resist the Biblical (that is, the hierarchical) principles of obedience and submission to a higher authority, claiming instead independence and autonomy in the often asserted phrase, "I've got my own will".

These conflicts also occur in the UAM and Catholic churches but to a lesser extent because, in the case of the UAM, the Aboriginal adherents are adopting European values (in the guise of Biblical principles), and in the Catholic church, the European leadership has become more accepting of Aboriginal values.

Boss/worker model

Aboriginal adherents of the AOG see the pastor/congregation relationship in terms of a boss/worker model. (See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the Aboriginal boss/worker model.) Although the boss/worker model is, in the Kimberley, an interpretation of the

station hierarchy, because it is an Aboriginal model, it incorporates egalitarian principles. Boss and worker have mutual responsibilities and obligations towards each other.

Aboriginal people in Halls Creek have very strong ideas about the way pastors should behave. They should always help people but they should not "rule people's lives". They should preach only good news and not talk about people (that is, point out people's misdemeanours) in sermons:

Bro. Phillip shouldn't talk against people [for chewing tobacco, drinking and playing cards]. He should pray for everyone and heal everyone. That's his job. (TH)

They [pastors] should only preach about Jesus, what he done for us. They shouldn't talk about drinking, and having friend [sexual partner], and getting country. (TT)

If missionaries fail to help Aborigines (with transportation, carting building materials and filling water drums for example) Aboriginal people will fail to carry out their obligations, that is, they will stop attending church.⁸ If deeply angered by the pastors' failure of responsibility, they will show their displeasure by going back to the "Devil's way", that is, by drinking, swearing and fighting.

If missionaries overstep the boundaries of their positions by trying to "rule people's lives", for example, by interfering in people's personal and family relationships, they are generally resisted.⁹ Women often

⁸ Bro. Phillip's initial inducements to attract the reserve people to the AOG church included carting firewood and water for them. This was just at a time when the Department of Community Services had decided to cease offering these services to Aboriginal people. (pers. com. Helen Ross)

⁹ Williams' Yolngu informants also expressed dislike of mission interference in their personal and family relationships:

complain that the pastors act like jealous spouses, telling them where they can go and what they can do. Men accuse the missionaries of taking on the surveillance and punitive roles of the police.

Aboriginal people see themselves as loyal to the church (including the pastors) that they belong to, but not necessarily obedient. Obedience is generally equated with weakness. For example, Aboriginal women in Halls Creek consider white women to be weak because they supposedly do what their husbands demand straight away and without argument. Aboriginal women always argue back. When Aboriginal Christians do what the pastors tell them without any show of resistance, particularly if it is an uncongenial task, they are believed to be "frightened of the missionaries".¹⁰

Sickness and Healing

Aboriginal mortality in Western Australia is 2.5 to 3 times that of the total Australian population (Thomson and Briscoe 1991:13). Crough and Christophersen (1993:3) describe the health and mortality statistics for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley as "particularly alarming". Cardio-vascular diseases and trauma (from motor vehicle and other accidents, suicide and self-inflicted injury, and homicide and other-inflicted injury) are the major causes of death in the Kimberley, and the death rates are three times greater than that of the general Australian population (Thomson and Briscoe 1991:16). Aboriginal

[A senior kinsman] said the problem with D [i.e. D's refusal to join her promised husband's household] was not the acting superintendent's business: his business was in the office and with affairs concerning all the mission, but *not* family business in the village. (Williams 1987:132)

¹⁰ This is a version of being "frightened of *gardiya*", a legacy of colonisation.

people in Halls Creek suffer from multiple degenerative diseases and these are appearing in increasingly younger age groups.

Aboriginal perspectives

As described in Chapter 1, the healthy body is clean and cool, allowing for an optimum flow of life energies. Fresh air blows in and out of the airways, infusing the body and enlivening one's faculties (of hearing for example) so that one can listen and understand. Life energies also flow through the bloodstream, dispersing to all parts of the body to nourish and strengthen it.

Sickness is some kind of obstruction to the healthy flow of life energies within the body and between bodies and other life-forms. It can be caused by a refusal of reciprocity which creates a moral imbalance in the living environment. The country can retaliate against human misconduct by throwing stones into the person's body. Sorcery, a human intervention, blocks flow by the insertion of foreign objects into the victim's body, or by "cooking them inside".¹¹

Healing begins with an investigation of the possible causes of illness and a redressing of imbalances. If sorcery is found to be a cause, it must be undone before its effects become irreversible. This requires power and knowledge which is normally available only to *mabarn* men.¹² The patient is treated by clearing the obstructing debris out of his or

¹¹ They take a small lizard. Bury im la hole gotta hot fire. Put that person's name in the lizard. Sing im to make im die. That person gonna dream all the time [about being ensorcelled]. He get cooked inside now. He'll go black inside. (LT)

¹² In the lizard example, the *mabarn* man must find the buried lizard, take it out of the hole and wash it in cold water. Only then will the patient begin to recover.

her body, and by infusing the body with life energy. This can be done by smoking the body or by inoculating the patient with cleaning and strengthening agents from the *mabarn* man's body.¹³

Radcliffe-Brown (1930) and Elkin (1930) claim that in Northwest Australia and Southeast Australia, traditional healers are closely connected with, and obtain their most dangerous powers from, Rainbow Snakes, the guardians of deep waterholes. The healer may obtain his power by diving into the waterhole and making contact with the Snake from whom he obtains quartz-crystals, other healing stones and little snakes (the progeny of the Rainbow Snakes) (Elkin 1930:349,350). In Western South Australia, the novice is swallowed by the Snake and held in his belly for some time before being vomited up and revived by experienced medicine men who insert pearl shells into his body to augment his senses. For example, shells are put into his ears so that he can hear and understand communications in the spirit and animal worlds and other more distant human worlds (Berndt and Berndt 1943:59,60).

Potent spirits of the dead, who themselves possess healing stones, assist medicine men in their healing practices (Berndt and Berndt 1943:57; Reid 1983:61-73; Tonkinson 1982:232-234). Medicine men differ in the amount of power they possess. Those who engage with the most dangerous powers (often located on the peripheries of countries) are the most potent and dangerous themselves. Women in most areas

¹³ As well as healing sickness in bodies and in the cosmos, the *mabarn* man seeks to reconcile people who are locked into antagonistic relationships:

He [*mabarn* man] tell im not to going against one another, and be friend.
 "You twofella supposed to be two relation," the *mabarn* man tell them...
 He same as like a Jesus and God... He talk to them good way: "You twofella [gotta be] good friend". (AS)

are believed to be capable of obtaining and manipulating healing powers, but not to the same extent as men (Berndt 1982:135,136).

In their healing practices, medicine men use special stones to "see" inside sick bodies, absorb and remove foreign matter, cool down hot blood, and repair damaged ligaments and sinews (Berndt and Berndt 1943:56; Reid 1983:61-77). Curing consists essentially in getting rid of the accumulated "bad stuff" in the body.¹⁴ Depending on its location within the body, healers may suck out the "bad stuff" or administer emetics to induce vomiting, and restore the normal functioning of the body (Tonkinson 1982:238).¹⁵

In East Kimberley, *mabarn* men frequently use snakes in their healing practices.¹⁶ The snakes (often a mother snake with a brood of young snakes) reside permanently in the *mabarn* man's body. Their activities (they travel around the body like a vacuum cleaner, sucking up all the debris) keep his body clean and in good health. To treat a sick person,

¹⁴ In East Arnhem Land, a man was diagnosed as having "a build up of semen" in his body as a result of engaging in incestuous sexual relations. The "semen refused to flow from his body", causing his body to swell up in a generalised oedema (Eastwell 1973:1013).

¹⁵ At Christmas Creek in South Kimberley at a ceremonial gathering of Walmajarri, Wangkajunga, Gugaja and Mangala people, a *jalangguru* [healer] attended a moribund patient, massaging his chest and "pushing the bad blood he had 'seen' down into the region above the navel". Then he vigorously sucked the area and produced bright red blood. A second *jalangguru* attended an elderly woman who had collapsed, retrieving her *mabarn* force which had escaped from her "causing her wind to close up". He "opened her wind" by vigorous massage of her chest and upper abdomen before reinserting her *mabarn* (Akerman 1979).

¹⁶ Lommel (1950:20) talks of medicine men (*barnmarn*) of West Kimberley producing snakes out of their navels. In a more recent exchange between Alan Rumsey, David Mowaljarlai, Paddy Womma and Laurie Cowenulli, Mowaljarlai says:

Sidney [a *barnmarn*] said to them... "I goin' to go now, to this snake, to clean me up. Lick me up. Make me better"... He went down inside water, and he got stone in the middle... where the snake sit down, he dry place. It's a cave... all the little-little snakes been coming out... that man was clean forever... [When curing people] he just talked 'em up, take'm out snake. He had snake in his body. He take'm out and put'm in the sick man and clean'm. (cited in Lommel and Mowaljarlai [editorial note] 1994:285,286)

he will draw the snakes from his stomach into his fingers and release them into the sick person's body. They will travel around the sick body, cleaning out all the rubbish. When they have completed their task, they will return to the *mabarn* man's body. If the sick person has been poisoned, the young snakes will die from ingesting the poison, but the mother snake will return to the *mabarn* man's body.

As well as snakes, the *mabarn* healer may have other animals inside his body such as turtles, dogs and birds. He is able to use their particular attributes, that is, their powers of flying, seeing in the dark, or smelling and tracking down murderers. He may sing these animals out from his stomach to carry out errands for him. For example, he may sing a spirit dog from his body to the camp of a sick person at night. The dog will vomit on the sick person, or lick his sores, and in the morning the sick person will be better. The healer also uses quartz crystals and pearl shells for diagnostic purposes (seeing inside the body) and for treatment (cleaning out the body).

Whatever the cause, patients (and healers) frequently visualise illness as "dirty (or stagnant) blood" or other bodily fluid which blocks the flow of life energies. A *mabarn* man diagnosed Jabia Crow's ailment thus:

You gotta no-good blood la them string [blood vessels].
Them string can't work much la you. Blood can't work
through you. Sometimes you get tangled... your veins
always be just like a doubled up. (JC)

Cleaning out the body of a sick person is like cleaning out a dirty waterhole. To clean out a waterhole, one clears out sticks, gravel and

other debris until the water can flow freely and run clear. Likewise, in the sick body:

He [*mabarn* man] was just getting all the blood out now, until that blood was real clear now. Clear blood. (GJ)¹⁷

Smoking the body also works in this way. The smoke takes the path of the breath through the body, clearing out the rubbish:

They get konkerberry bushes and orange tree bushes. Make a smoke. They put him [the sick person] in the smoke. Clear everything right through from ears and nose and head. Right through they clean him. (BM)

The country is also a source of healing and strengthening substances. "Bush medicines" and healing waters are used for preventative and curative purposes.¹⁸ Ancestral beings and *mamu/juwarri* (spirits of the dead) are healers in their own right, with or without the mediatorial skills of *mabarn* men:

My old relation got a message that I was sick so she came and sat on the floor, and she was crying, crying. Then she was singing some kind of corroboree and saying, "*Mamu, mamu*, you fellas come fix im up, come fix im up your *jaja* [granddaughter] now". Just like she was talking to a big mob of spirits... My little girls was telling me, "Oh, that old woman trying to sing chorus [Christian song] to you mum". But it wasn't chorus she was trying to sing. She was trying to sing in her language to the spirits... to *mamu*, to make me better. (GJ)

¹⁷ In West Kimberley, the *banman* [medicine man] looked at this sick man, saw the place where he had the pain. "Ah, here is where you have the pain". The *gadun* [healer] then sucked the bad blood, spat it out and had taken the suffering away. The good blood was flowing, the man became strong and never suffered again. (Mowaljarlai, cited in Mowaljarlai and Malnic 1993:177)

¹⁸ At Yirrkala, Reid's informant stated that a billabong in his own country was a 'clever' place because of its associations with the Dreaming, and that washing in the billabong conferred good health (1983:144).

Church healing

In Halls Creek, the AOG church in particular presents itself to Aboriginal people in terms of healing, frequently inviting people to "Come to our church. Come for healing". Advertisements for forthcoming church conventions claim that AOG meetings will feature miracles and healings. The AOG missionaries claim that in the early days of their ministry in Halls Creek, God enabled them to work mighty miracles, healing the sick, casting out demons and raising the dead to life. There was a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people of Halls Creek at this time.

Non-churchgoing relatives of AOG Aborigines claim that when Bro. Phillip first came to Halls Creek, he told people in his church to come off their medications and trust in God to heal them. A number followed his instructions and died as a result. Today, Bro. Phillip appears to have modified this message. His growing number of white missionary assistants receive hospital treatment for their many ailments. However, he still insists that God does not want people going down to Perth to undergo major operations, for example, kidney transplants. God wants to heal them in their own environment and without human intervention to demonstrate to Halls Creek people his supernatural power.

Healing sessions

Missionaries believe that if they have sufficient faith and believe strongly that God will heal them that this faith will release God's

healing power. For this reason they make extravagant claims during healing sessions that the sick person will never again need their wheelchair, their dialysis tubes or their insulin. They claim that "God is at this very moment fashioning new kidneys for [the sick person] with his own hands" (Pastor Daniel, AOG).

Satan, the origin of all earthly sickness, must be immobilised during healing sessions so that the healing power of Christ can flow unimpeded. Satan is bound with an ancient Near Eastern curse formula found in the Old Testament.¹⁹ Only people with "pure hearts" who are walking in fellowship with God and are obedient to his commands, can engage in this ministry:

I bind Satan. I bind the power of sickness. I bind this cancer in the Name of Jesus. Release him! Loosen him, Jesus! You are going to heal [the sick person] tonight. (Bro. Phillip, AOG)

Young men in particular are primed to take a leading role in the healing ministry. Young men (in their 20s and 30s) who are currently "on fire" (filled with zeal) for the Lord are referred to as God's "spiritual giants" and as "prayer warriors". They are given special attention by the AOG missionaries including private classes on the performance of Holy Spirit music. At the climax of evening church services when people have surged forward to "the altar" to meet with God, these young men are given the task of administering Holy Spirit power (by the laying on of hands and praying).²⁰

¹⁹ See Gager, J.G. 1992 *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*.

²⁰ See section titled *At the altar* in this chapter.

AOG missionaries make a sharp gender distinction in their church. Men are encouraged to be active and women passive. A sermon by Pastor Daniel reveals this distinction quite clearly:

God wants the Christian women of Halls Creek to be more beautiful than the sun and stars. The sun and stars will look black in comparison to the women. God wants the Christian men of Halls Creek to be glorious and mighty, to be noble warriors for him. This was our inheritance before the Fall. And it is our destination in Christ. (Pastor Daniel, AOG)

Young men who have not had to demonstrate maturity and responsibility in the Christian domain are being given *mabarn*-type roles, as well as roles occupied by traditional singers in the Aboriginal context, by the AOG missionaries, that is, drawing people to God with Holy Spirit music, binding Satan, and casting out demons and sickness in the Name of Jesus.

Women generally are the recipients of this ministry. Women make up the bulk of the AOG congregation²¹ and are not given leadership positions.²² At the climax of church services they stand at the altar with arms outstretched, hands and bodies quivering, falling to the floor (a position of reception?). Mature, responsible and competent women must remain in passive, recipient roles while irresponsible men are given active, administering roles.²³

²¹ Men who are believed to be in close fellowship with God (i.e. not sinning) are occupied during the church services as musicians, song leaders, preachers, doormen and money collectors, assistants at the Lord's Supper and healers/counsellors.

²² Women may teach children and lead children's prayer groups. They may be active in extra-church activities such as women's groups.

²³ At one point after a woman complained about men touching her, women were called up to lay hands on other women. This innovation lasted only a matter of weeks, however, before reverting to the all-male administration of Holy Spirit power.

Aboriginal perspectives on healing

Although missionaries stress that sickness in this world does not come from God - it is a consequence of Satan's rebellion and fall - Aboriginal people have not deferred all moral retribution to a spiritual afterlife. Because this world (and not just a utopian afterworld) is a world of moral order, God must exact payment for wrongs committed to satisfy his requirement for balanced justice here and now. God can make people sick.

God is also a doctor who heals people. His healing powers are both curative and prophylactic. Aboriginal people go forward in healing services not just to be cured of overt diseases, but to accumulate power to keep them alive and strong, and to provide immunity against disease or misfortune. "God's power" is also a preventative against sorcery:

When person sing that man, if he go to church every time, believe in Lord, never drink, never swear, never smoke, never fall back, just trust in the Lord, that person can't get sick. They can sing im doesn't matter how much. He won't get hurt. (JC)

According to Maddy Jarra and others, all the things that *mabarn* men can do are recorded in the Bible. Jesus, when he lived on earth, did *mabarn* work, healing the sick, raising the dead, and clearing the area of strange spirits. Today, the Holy Spirit continues this work. When missionaries lay their hands on people to heal them, Holy Spirit power comes out through their fingers and travels around the sick person's body in order to heal and strengthen them.

Christian prayer also undoes curses and sorcery. A woman was involved in a fight in which she and her three daughters were repeatedly cursed and beaten by a drunken son-in-law. She went for help to a number of government agencies, in particular to the Department of Community Services and Homeswest (State Housing Commission), but they were unable to alleviate her problem in the short term (that is, to find alternative accommodation for her). The AOG church, however, took her complaint seriously and held a special ceremony for her during their church service. The woman stood at the front of the church and members of the congregation came forward to lay hands on her, while Bro. Phillip prayed, binding the power of Satan over Lumboo Creek Reserve.

Most Aboriginal Christians use ritual healing (in church) as a first line of attack against sickness, followed by hospital treatment.²⁴ Some Christians (both in the AOG and UAM) use *mabarn* healing in combination with church healing, particularly if they have a relative who has demonstrated healing powers. One UAM adherent who survived a serious head injury, frequently has a *mabarn* man lay his hands on her head to cool her down. Another listens to a healer's diagnosis and advice but does not receive treatment from him.

In earlier days, during "station times" God and *mabarn* healers were able to work together in a kind of collaboration that does not seem possible today. Angels spoke to *mabarn* men in their dreams and told

²⁴ According to Reid (1983:97), Yolngu people at Yirrkala see western doctors and traditional healers as having "different but complementary abilities". *Marrnggitj* healers are best equipped to investigate the causes of illness and western practitioners to treat the symptoms.

them how to heal people.²⁵ Today, Jesus heals "*gardiya way*", that is, in church settings preferably, in response to Christian prayer and the laying on of hands. *Mabarn* men heal "*mamu way*" which, for conservative evangelical Christians is the "Devil's way".

Death and death-related issues

Today, in Halls Creek, funeral services and burials are conducted by one of the three churches. Traditional public funerary ceremonies involving the whole community in mourning and restitution are no longer held. During Moola Bulla (and station) times, however, the Department of Native Affairs did not conduct funerals for Aboriginal people. Births and deaths continued to be managed by Aboriginal people within a world view which emphasized balanced reciprocity and the recycling of life-forces between generations.

Traditional death practices focus around discovery of the deceased's murderer, avoidance of the deceased's ghost (in its immediate postmortem state), avenging the deceased's death, and return of ancestral life-forces to the land. (See Bohemia and McGregor 1991:86-106; Elkin 1937:275-299; and Kaberry 1935:33-47; 1939:209-218 for descriptions of these practices.) Many of these practices no longer take place today because the Aboriginal body has been incorporated into Western medical practice and appropriated for burial by the churches.

²⁵ Reid (1983:65) reports that at Yirrkala, a Christianised community in Arnhem Land, angels continue to collaborate with traditional healers. A woman who is now a healer died, and her body was placed in a tree. "While she was dead, angels came down from heaven and gave her the twelve *manggata* (spirit familiars) she has today. Of these, the three most important are James, Peter and John".

However, although the churches have been successful in suppressing traditional death practices such as "sorry camps",²⁶ ritualised accusation and fighting, and revenge expeditions, they have been unable to suppress (or appropriate) the beliefs and values which underlie these practices. There is a basic conflict of values between Western Christianity and Aboriginal (whether Christian or non-Christian) world views which emerges in particular contexts, and death is one of these contexts. I will be discussing these conflicts in detail in Chapter 7.

Most Aboriginal people in Halls Creek, whether of full or mixed descent, have not severed the social and moral links between the living and the dead. Mourning rituals which involve wailing, self-laceration and the shedding of blood are a form of liminal participation by the living in the state of the dead (see Seaford 1994:166; also Tonkinson 1991:104). Aboriginal Christians who continue these practices, whether surreptitiously or in public, do so by assimilating them to Christian beliefs and practices. For Gabriel Jordan, a long-time adherent of the UAM church, if Jesus could shed his blood for sinners, she can shed some of her blood for family members who have died. Food taboos are also acceptable because (some) Christians fast at Easter, the time of Jesus' death.

Aboriginal Christians in the UAM and AOG also carry out practices which are concerned with avoiding the ghost of the newly deceased person, such as moving out of the house once occupied by the deceased, smoking property and people and avoiding using the name

²⁶ In seclusion from the general community. Close relatives are painted with white clay. Food taboos and speech taboos are imposed on widows.

of the dead. Smoking is carried out to disperse the deceased person's spirit (whether in the form of a walking ghost, a memory-image or a dream-image). Children (whose life-force is immature) are particularly vulnerable to attack by new *juwarri*.²⁷ UAM Christians claim they smoke their houses to rid the house of memories, an explanation which has proven successful because of its resonances with European experiences of death.

For many Aboriginal people in Halls Creek (whether Christian or non-Christian), avenging the deaths of family members is a moral imperative. However, the power used to perform this task is the "Devil's power" and this is a cause of some dilemma. Some Christians are able to use this power with equanimity:

I'm going to take Jagamarra's sweaty clothes to the boss of the Snake at Mistake Creek. The Snake will come straight up out of the water like a cloud. Travelling behind la wind. It will find the right man. It can smell the man who bin do [ensorcell] him. It don't make mistakes. It's the Satan, that one. It's the Devil's power. We gotta take it there. (LP)

Others (with more intensive missionary educations) are not able to do this, but claim that God has avenged the deaths of their family members:

Mum and dad was really worrying about [a death in the family]. They was say, "What we gonna do?" I was tell them, "Leave it to God. God can show we now". I was dreaming, you know. God bin show me vision. He bin show me really miracle [i.e. he revealed the cause of Hester's death]. Same as Aboriginal way. Right person we find im. God was send that

²⁷ Kaberry states that the spirits of the dead (*djuari*) have the power to influence the living either malevolently or benignly... kinship ties are so strong that the *djuari* may seek to take the surviving relatives with them. (Kaberry 1939:210)

lightning now. Old man was inside la tent. Lightning was strike and old man was inside now, dead. Same as Elijah when he bin climb up la hill. The lightning was strike him and he bin disappear right there la hill. Story about in Bible.
(MJ)

Church funerals

Church funerals are sites of conflict in Aboriginal Halls Creek. Particularly since the arrival of the AOG, there have been splits in families' church affiliations. Some people claim that the churches in general have separated families. Others point to the AOG in particular, because the principle pastor (in the early days especially) spoke against family solidarity, seeing it as something which weakened church affiliation. Today he can see the benefits of family ties for church expansion, but continues to tell Christians to separate from their non-Christian relatives.

There have been a number of cases where an old person was attracted to AOG meetings because of their claims to heal, and was attending the AOG church at the time of their death, but whose family in general affiliated with (but did not necessarily attend) the UAM. In most of these cases the family overrode the person's individual church affiliation, and arranged for the UAM to conduct the funeral, on one occasion waiting for two months for the UAM pastor to return from holidays before burying the body.

Aboriginal people believe that if you attend church (which is a *gardiya* institution), you must conform to *gardiya* conventions. At church funerals, Mediterranean-European colour symbolism prevails. The immediate family of the deceased take particular care to dress correctly.

Women wear black dresses and men wear dark trousers and white shirts. Other more distant relatives will try to wear at least one article of black clothing. Traditional Aboriginal practice, of painting the body with white clay (see Kaberry 1935:35) is never mentioned.

Women's ceremonies subsumed by the churches

Women's ceremonies in East Kimberley performed to guide women safely through puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and parturition have been described by Kaberry (1939:219-245). These ceremonies infuse the woman's body with healing and strengthening powers, preparing her body for procreation and lactation, and promoting growth and development of the unborn child. *Daragu*²⁸ songs ease the pain of childbirth, control the quantity and flow of body fluids, and provide overall protection for mother and child during the vulnerable neonatal period.

These ceremonies were carried out by women for women, and away from the male gaze. Women empowered themselves and their children by participation in women's law ceremonies. Pregnant women and children are vulnerable to social and moral imbalances in the world, and particularly to retributions from the spirit world. Children's life-force is built up in their early years within women's ceremonies. Women's ceremonies are healing, both prophylactic and curative.

Women's regional ceremonies such as Jarrarda and Yawulyu, are discussed by Berndt (1950,1973), Munn (1973), Bell (1983,1994), Rose

²⁸ Secret-sacred, powerful, dangerous.

(1992) and Watson (1996,1997). They are conducted to initiate women into the religious life, to celebrate the transformative journeys of the ancestral beings, and to activate ancestral power for human purposes. Women are instructed in their rights and responsibilities in relation to land, perform ceremonies to regenerate country and people, and participate in alliance-forming exchanges with other groups.

Women's ceremonies increase the health and vitality of country and people. Specific curing rituals may be carried out for the sick and infirm using the blood, fat and underarm sweat of women healers to infuse bodies with strength. Red ochre is also efficacious (Bell 1983:161; Berndt 1950:45). Health of the body is not divorced from the health and well-being of the country and the cosmos generally. Ceremonies are performed to stop fights and quarrels, heal conflicts, and promote harmonious relations among countrymen and between wider groups of people. Dispute resolution ceremonies "cool and quieten the blood" of antagonists (Berndt 1950:45).

The Jarrarda and Yawulyu ceremonies celebrate the land-transforming journeys of the Munga Munga women. In the Gunabibi song cycles of the Gulf country, the Munga Munga women are the daughters of the Wawilak Sisters (Reay 1970:169). Although in the Arnhem Land, men stole the ritual paraphernalia of the Wawilak Sisters and exclude contemporary women from full participation in the Gunabibi ceremonies, women have access to the stories and ceremonies of their daughters, the Munga Munga women. In the performance of Munga Munga song cycles in the Balgo region, contemporary women are contesting men's exclusive access to ancestral domains and inside

knowledge (Watson 1996:137,138).²⁹ In a related song cycle of this region, Nakkarra Nakkarra women steal ritual objects back from men in order to regain some of their "original" power (p 140-142). New ceremonies and ritual knowledge can be generated through dreams (Berndt 1973:27-31).

In Western Christianity, women have not had separate access to the divine realm in order to mobilise spiritual forces and generate new forms and practices.³⁰ In the Jewish and Christian traditions, spiritual power was mediated through men. The conservative evangelical Christian tradition, unlike some liberalising churches, still denies women access to major leadership roles in the church. And the UAM and AOG churches view an autonomous women's spirituality (and sociality) as unnatural and abhorrent.

Women's procreative-regenerative rituals have been rendered almost obsolete by a modern technologised and bureaucratised society. Today, the pregnant Aboriginal body has been incorporated into Western medical practice and the mother-child dyad has been appropriated by welfare agencies and the churches. Jesus, during his earthly ministry, made a point of welcoming and blessing children, and the church sees this as a continuing ministry.

Aboriginal women frequently bring their children to the altar at the conclusion of church services to have the pastors lay their hands on

²⁹ This process is not unlike the El-Baal rivalry of the ancient Near Eastern religions. If one sector of society feels oppressed by the reigning deities or dominant spiritual powers, they can always bring into being a new generation of gods or ancestors who are sympathetic to their aspirations. In hierarchical societies, however, this option is probably only available to the (disaffected) upper classes.

³⁰ An exception to this may be in religious orders where women's spirituality appears (to some extent) to have escaped the control of men.

them. Women who are not normally churchgoers may attend church regularly for a few months after the birth of a child. Two women in particular, who had complicated childbirths (a Caesarian section and the birth of twins) attended the AOG church every week for four to five months, until they no longer felt vulnerable, and other interests claimed their attention.

Women who once prepared themselves for childbirth and motherhood through women's ceremonies, have during the colonisation process, relinquished control of their procreative processes to largely male-administered Western medical and ecclesiastical institutions.³¹

Singing-Dancing

Maggie Goddard³² used to dance in church. She told them [the UAM Christians], "If you really happy in the Lord, you can dance". If someone was sick, everyone came and laid hands on the person, and one person prayed in tongues over the sick person. (JC)

Traditionally, singing-dancing was a way of tapping into, or connecting with, ancestral powers. The cosmos vibrates with ancestral power, and the movement of wind through the land, and through

³¹ The churches have been successful in suppressing traditional religious practices such as initiation ceremonies and death rituals which are expressed through performance and spectacle. They have been markedly less successful in suppressing (or appropriating) the beliefs and values which underlie these practices. Beliefs and values cannot be seen, and values in particular are rarely articulated. Both Aborigines and missionaries tend to interpret the Other's behaviour by situating it within their own cultural context and judging it according to their own standards of appropriate behaviour. As a result, there is a great deal of unrecognised misinterpretation and miscommunication between Aborigines and missionaries. This protects Aborigines' beliefs and values from close scrutiny and evaluation by missionaries and other agents of change.

³² UAM missionary prior to 1982 leadership crisis.

living bodies, is an example of this. A healthy body is one through which fresh air (and other life energies) can flow unimpeded. Singing utilises breath to produce sound waves which vibrate through the body. Vocal utterances (words) are not abstract entities which circulate in disembodied form, but are consubstantial with, and partake in the reality of, ancestral existence (see Comaroff 1992:254-257 on words and consubstantiality; also Povinelli 1993:34).

The human body is a conduit for ancestral life-forces, and dancing facilitates the flow of life energies between human beings and between humans and the living environment. Jackson and Karp (1990), referring to Devisch's (1984) paper, write of the relationship between life-force, dancing and sexuality in an African culture:

Yaka dancing ... is an experience of the life-force flowing through and among the dancers ... a celebration of the power of sexuality to create social life as well as recreate it in the face of death, disease and disorder... creating links between the vital energy of the individual body, the social body, and the cosmos (Jackson and Karp 1990:22).

This relationship is also evident in Aboriginal ceremonial dancing. In Yolngu ceremonies, dancers identify themselves (through body painting and imitative performance) with their ancestral spirits, "and with each performance they acquire more of their essence, become more like them" (Williams 1986:44). Aborigines "stimulate the energies that bring increase and renewal" by bodily contact with ancestral substances, painting and repainting people and objects with ancestral designs, and "dancing and singing at important sites" (Mowaljarlai 1992:9, cited in Watson 1997:3).

A second generation of UAM missionaries to the Kimberley introduced Pentecostal practices including dancing and speaking in tongues to the Halls Creek church in 1978. After five years of indecision, the anti-Pentecostal UAM Council in Perth asked them to leave. Today, Pentecostal interpretations of Holy Spirit activity are not taught or practised in the Halls Creek People's Church.

The AOG, however, promotes singing and dancing in its church services. At the Halls Creek AOG church, after a brief and intense prayer meeting held at the back of the church to bind the forces of evil, a singing session commences led by an Aboriginal man who is being prepared for leadership in the church. Dancing may occur spontaneously during these sessions. At other times a pastor may call all Holy Spirit Christians³³ to the front of the church to sing and dance, separating and distinguishing them from the sinners and backsliders who sit silent and unmoved at the back of the church.

The dancing style used in the AOG church is reminiscent of European folk dancing with forward movement and straight leg hopping in contrast to the sensuous hip-rotating style of African dancing. These singing sessions may, if the Holy Spirit is flowing with power, move into a heightened form of worship/communion in which people stand with arms uplifted and eyes closed, swaying gently from side to side, groaning and speaking in tongues. It is in these periods of ecstatic worship that human sexuality, which had perhaps been dormant until then, is activated. Waves of singing/chanting increase in velocity to a crescendo of loudness and intensity. Glossalalia occurs at this point, followed by a period of quiet and stillness. Women in particular are

³³ Christians who have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

able to express their sexuality during these sessions - a sort of floating, lingering, gentle ecstasy.³⁴ The men are inclined to stand woodenly. Men, on the other hand, excel at power praying which takes place in pre-service prayer meetings and during healing services (in both cases, needed for the binding of evil forces).³⁵

It is during these Holy Spirit prayer/praise sessions that the boundary between heaven and earth can dissolve and the glory of God can break through with power, manifesting itself in miracles and healings. That this so rarely occurs in Halls Creek is a great disappointment to the AOG pastors. Other manifestations of the spirit world can occur during these sessions. On one occasion an Aboriginal man who was being prepared for leadership in the church was leading the singing session. After calling all the Christians forward to sing and dance for the Lord, he led the congregation into a Holy Spirit prayer/praise session. The chanting under his guidance took on a traditional desert-

³⁴ The power of music resides in its ability to construct subjective experiences that we then embrace as our own most private feelings. (McClary 1995:100)

McClary (1995:82-101), who argues against idealist conceptions of music (which can be traced back to Pythagoras' obsession with numbers as pure forms), sees music as always grounded in the body. She examines the 16th century *ciaccona* dance style (a product of the West's encounter with the Latin American/African body) and Italian Baroque opera which took as its starting point the sensuous (grotesque?) body of medieval Europe. Both of these music forms lead participants into a "surrender to religious ecstasy" which she sees as a "graphic simulation of the phenomenological state of orgasm" with a blurring of ego boundaries.

Eilberg-Schwartz (1994:1-4) claims that eroticism has always been part of the human response to the divine Imaginary. But for men in the Judaeo-Christian monotheistic traditions, this has been problematic because of a fear of homoeroticism. In both Jewish and Christian traditions, a solution has been to feminise the human soul:

Annul me in my manhood, Lord, and make me women-sexed and weak,
If by that total transformation I might know Thee more.
What is the worth of my own sex that the bold possessive instinct
Should but shoulder Thee aside? What uselessness is housed in my loins,
To drive, drive, the rampant pride of life,
When what is needful is a hushed quiescence?
"The soul is feminine to God".

(Brother Antoninus 1962, cited in Eilberg-Schwartz 1994:137)

³⁵ For discussion of masculine power praying, see section titled *At the Altar* in this chapter.

style ceremonial rhythm. It sounded wonderful. Everyone joined in with beaming faces. But the principle AOG pastor who believes that all forms of traditional Aboriginality are linked to demonic realms, quickly relieved Kelly of the microphone, returning the chanting to a medieval European style.

It was many months before Kelly was given permission to lead the prayer/praise worship sessions again. He had to reinstate himself with the AOG leadership, proving to them that he was truly a Holy Spirit Christian. He did this by actively participating in church services, contributing singing items and frequent testimonies. His testimonies told of his life before he was filled with the Holy Spirit (he was lazy and tired, and half-hearted in his Christian life) and how his life had now changed. At the altar he would demonstrate his ability to chant/speak in tongues in a European manner, often continuing long after everyone else had returned to their seats.

The Lord's Supper

In some egalitarian indigenous cultures, life-force is recycled between the living and the dead. Death is never a completed project because the remains of death (bones *et cetera*) contain the seeds of life. Sanday (1986:7) uses the term "endocannibalism"³⁶ to talk about human appropriation of ancestral life-force. In Hua society, in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, humans eat the flesh and (crushed) bones of their potent dead to gain its life-renewing energy and strength. Mortuary cannibalism enables the circulation of procreative substances necessary to reproduce the social and cosmic order.

³⁶ That is, mortuary cannibalism of one's own relatives.

Mortuary cannibalism in Aboriginal Australia is mentioned by Howitt (1904), Roth (1907), Spencer (1914), Spencer and Gillen (1904), Radcliffe-Brown (1930), McConnel (1937) and others. Maddock (1969:98-100) sees "Mara necrophagy" as part of a larger system of reciprocal exchange involving alliance-forming groups in the Roper River/Bamyili area. In exchange for a mother (who contributes flesh from her body to the recipient group in the form of children), the recipient group returns a corpse to the mother-bestowing group for them to eat (and thus returns the flesh).

In East Kimberley, when Aboriginal people still controlled their own funerary arrangements, the flesh and bones of the potent dead were used to heal and strengthen the bodies of the living:

Old people used to say, "Oh that girl proper skinny. We'll have to get flesh la that body". They were get some flesh from that dead body, mix im up gotta water and make damper. Sometimes they do bone. They gettim bone and smash im up gotta stone. They mix im up la milk and puttim la *nalija* [tea]. They might do blood and bone mix. That girl gonna go fat all the time now. [S]he can't go skinny. (JC)

However, in hierarchical societies where the gods have achieved immortality and humans have become the dependents of the gods, this reciprocal exchange between the living and the dead no longer occurs. Bergmann (1992:5) states that Christianity reintroduced the practice of incorporating the substance of the god into the human body at Holy Communion.

There is evidence that Aboriginal Christians in Halls Creek recognise the Lord's Supper as a form of mortuary cannibalism:

Wine is the blood of Jesus. And that bread what we take, that's the one what they were break his bone, and smash im up. That's why we break bread and eat im. (JC)

Maddy Jarra makes a comparison between Holy Communion and the East Kimberley "funeral feast"/inquest:

Aboriginal way they gotta sit down la circle. Relation get all the damper gotta blood and bone. They break im up damper. Give it to them mouth. Keep feeding them all the way. And that right man [i.e. the murderer], something rattle inside his throat. He gonna be coughing all the way now. He gonna choke himself. He'll drop right there. (MJ)

The AOG leadership in Halls Creek treats the Lord's Supper not just as a rite of remembrance but as a ritual which is efficacious in itself. The bread and wine contain the cleansing and healing properties of Christ's sacrificial body:

There is power in the bread and the wine. Kelly, you can be healed as you take the bread. Heal that boil Lord. Drive that boil out right now in Jesus' Name. (Pastor Daniel)

Jesus, I'm reaching for the new wine. Thank you, Jesus. Praise you, Jesus. I've got new life in Christ. O, glory glory! Hallelujah! We're free from sin. (Pastor Daniel)

We drinking blood. Jesus' blood. That bone we have im. That bread. Make im good [i.e. healthy and strong] must be. Might be make im heal up. (L)

When you have Lord's Supper every time, that wash your blood out. That wash all the sin out of you. Cleans your heart. Cleans your body. (JC)

At the altar

Although Holy Spirit power as described in New Testament narratives is universal and salvific, in 20th century American Pentecostalism it absorbed a new set of characteristics from Black American Christianity, a hybrid spirituality with roots in African agricultural religions. (See MacRobert 1988 for a discussion on the black roots of modern American Pentecostalism.)

West African religions participated in an organic view of the world³⁷ which saw humans existing in vital connection with other life-forms and with the world around them. Rituals activated the connections between life-worlds and life-forms, enabling a flow of knowledge and power between them. West African religionists engaged in animal sacrifice, divination, spirit possession, spirit healing, prophesying and exorcism. Their motor behaviour during religious ceremonies exhibited repetitious antiphonal singing, glossalalia, polyrhythmic hand clapping and feet stamping, swaying of bodies and falling into trances (MacRobert 1988:29-35). These motor behaviours entered the repertoire of 20th century American Pentecostalism via the Black American "Azusa Street Revival" (p 52-53).³⁸

³⁷ That is, they had not been dislocated from the organic world of fecundity, growth and decay as had the hellenistic Mediterranean religions (see Chapter 1).

³⁸ The appearance of ecstatic phenomena such as spirit possession and communal healing rites in Black America and in the traditional religions of West Africa has been well documented by historians, anthropologists, and religious scholars (see Marks 1974; Mitchell 1975; Raboteau 1978; Smith 1990; Walker 1972). Stuckey (1987,1995) discusses in particular the Ring Shout, an ecstatic dance form which emerged in Black American Christianity during the slave period. He has traced it back to a West African ancestral dance (the ring ceremony) which links death, sexuality and regeneration. Dancers circle in a counter-clockwise direction with slow shuffling gait, their feet in continuous contact with the earth and their arms outstretched and quivering. Spirit possession occurs at the climax of the ceremony and in the Christian context this is equated with conversion (Stuckey 1987). Black American preachers and song leaders engage in "trance shouting", a vocalisation style

In the modern Pentecostal movement, as in African and Black American religions, spiritual power is captured and channelled through bodies by agricultural metaphors. Holy Spirit power falls like rain from the sky and moves through (swaying) bodies as a river flows through the waiting earth.

We need to stand in the presence of the Lord and praise his Name and keep on praising him until heaven itself is moved and the power of the Holy Spirit comes and falls upon us like rain. (Pastor Oliver, AOG)

There is a young man here not speaking in tongues, not flowing with the Holy Spirit. He will be released tonight. Come forward now and lay your hands on him. The rivers of living water never dry up. Hallelujah! (Pastor Daniel, AOG)

However, any feminine metaphors of fecundity inherent in African and Black American religions, seem to have been erased by the AOG. Holy Spirit power in the AOG church is an extension of the phallic male body. It is a penetrative masculine power:

The Lord says, "I want to push my power through you, and let my power flow through you". We pray that the Spirit will go in deep and touch that person. (Pastor Daniel)

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Holy Spirit power is also administered by men. At the altar, men are given the task of laying hands on people, binding Satan, and casting demons and sickness out

which includes changes in pitch, volume and vowel length, hyperventilation, glottalisation and repetition (Marks 1974:90).

It is interesting to note here that although the AOG pastors in Halls Creek exhibit a deep suspicion of Aboriginal ceremonial rhythms, they have readily and unwittingly adopted African American "trance shouting" into their preaching and song leading styles. They have also uncritically adopted current "white" Pentecostal fashions such as the "Toronto Blessing" into their church services (see Wiltshire 1995:8).

of bodies in the Name of Jesus. Masculine power praying, that is, the utterance of words in sharp staccato style, accompanied by loud clapping, is used when dealing with Satan.³⁹ The impressive performers in this prayer style increase in loudness and speed (like a racing commentator), erupting into glossalalia at the peak of the performance. The task of prayer warriors is to engage in battle with the forces of evil, subdue Satan's army and penetrate to the Kingdom of God. The language used is masculinist and phallocentric: the language of penetration, warfare and colonisation:

Christians are in battle with Satan. We must continually battle the evil forces. The Devil's army will come against us when we are most on fire for the Lord. We have to push back Satan's army through prayer. (Pastor Daniel)

We are involved in spiritual warfare. God has given us [spiritual] weapons. We have to ram through the powers of darkness to get through to God. We have to pierce the heavenlies. (Bro. Angus)

Women, in response to Holy Spirit praying and the laying on of hands, will start a high pitched keening, standing with arms raised and hands flickering. Bodily quivering is a manifestation of power flowing through one's body.⁴⁰ The AOG leadership appears to be very impressed with the women's response to Holy Spirit power, and may encourage this response if the meeting appears otherwise flat. Aboriginal men, however, are not so impressed. Women are simply more vulnerable than men to the spirit world. Men's explanation for

³⁹ There may be similarities between power praying (with its connection to African American "trance shouting") in the AOG church and the shouting of power words during Aboriginal men's ceremonies (see Morphy 1991:189) which makes this form of communion attractive to men.

⁴⁰ In traditional dancing, quivering also has sexual-procreative connotations (see Berndt 1950:33; Meggitt 1962:65; Munn 1973:217; Reay 1970:168; Strehlow 1970:516-520).

the differences in gender responses is, "The women have weak hearts. The men are hard" (LP). In Arnhem Land ritual practice, men reserve the most powerful manifestations of ancestral power to themselves and deny women the opportunity to experience and utilise this power (Morphy 1991:195). In the Halls Creek Christian context, men continue to declare that women have no power (and little knowledge) and are therefore ill-equipped to engage in the strong spiritual labour required of healers and counsellors at the altar.

Although women speak in tongues more often than men do, it is generally men who interpret tongues.⁴¹ Glossalalia therefore cannot have its full force in Halls Creek Pentecostalism. The potential for liberation of repressed voices (both men's and women's) through spirit possession and performance is halted by the requirement for interpretation. Interpretation, which must conform to the written Word, brings the potential disorderliness of heteroglossia back under the control of the authoritative male voice, that is, the Scriptures.⁴²

Women, when touched by the Holy Spirit, also fall to the floor more frequently than men. Men generally see themselves as strong and able to withstand the jolts of the Holy Spirit. Old and sick (weak) men may

⁴¹ Interpretation of tongues is a convention in most Pentecostal denominations. Interpretation is also a gift of the Holy Spirit. After a person brings a message in tongues to the church, another person should interpret that utterance, to ensure that it is God and not Satan who is speaking to the congregation.

⁴² While, in East Kimberley, Aborigines are not able to utilise spirit possession as a mode of resistance to hegemonic structures and practices, they are able to use dreams in this way. Dreams do not seem to require Biblical confirmation to be acceptable in the evangelical Christian tradition. Pastors in the AOG church see their dreams as revelations from God (i.e. revelations about happenings in Halls Creek and the wider world), and may expound on them in their sermons. However, Aboriginal dreams, particularly those whose content is personal in nature, are unlikely to enter the public arena to become orthodox forms of knowledge or to change Christian culture in Halls Creek. Rather, they circulate as modes of resistance at a subsurface level, and may legitimise behaviours such as seeking new sexual partners.

fall to the floor. One man explained his experiences of falling down at the altar. When he was a new Christian and backsliding all the time, he often fell to the floor when touched by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is unable to stay in the heart of a person who swears and drinks grog. Without Jesus in one's heart, one will be weak and unable to withstand strong spiritual power. Today, Laurie is a strong Christian. Jesus is in his heart all the time. He no longer falls down at the altar.

The touch of the Holy Spirit is experienced in terms of traditional understandings of hot and cold processes and their effects in the world and in the body:⁴³

Bro. Phillip church has the Spirit. When he prays for you, it's like cold water running through you. (LT)

He [Holy Spirit] just like a springwater. You gonna feel cold. Holy Spirit just go all over la you. That's the *Ngarbuny* [Father's] blessing. (SH)

The Holy Spirit's touch is like the *mabarn* man's touch (or the *mamu*'s touch):

Father for Tiger had his own *juwarri*. He was a cleverman. They were tell him, "She's sick that way". When he were touch me, I were feel cold everywhere. He were clean me out. I were have no more pain and skinny. (JC)

Pussycat [*kukurr*] belong to the desert people. That's a *mamu* too, that *kukurr*.⁴⁴ He might touch you in the night. Hit you with his *binyjawinyja* [quartz crystal]. Make you clever. You can see *mamu* now. (LP)

⁴³ In hot climates, cool rivers and waterholes are refreshing and life-giving. Excessive and prolonged heat leads to dessication and even death. In hell, according to AOG Christians, the rivers and waterholes will be boiling. Europeans, however, developed their hot/cold metaphors in the Northern Hemisphere where warmth was desirable and life-sustaining.

⁴⁴ Spirit of the dead [Walmajarri language].

The UAM church also has altar calls, but there are no spectacular displays of Holy Spirit power. People stand quietly at the altar and are counselled and prayed over by the pastor or elders. They are then asked to confess their faith before the congregation.

Although the UAM does not rely on dramatic events to reassure themselves that God is in their midst, there is evidence that some AOG practices are crossing over into the AIM/UAM churches.⁴⁵ The wife of an itinerant (UAM) Aboriginal pastor who travels throughout the Kimberley claims to have learned techniques to break Satan's power from the AOG. The UAM did not teach her this.

The July 1995 issue of *The AIM*⁴⁶ features an account of an exorcism which took place in Katherine:

I lay my hands on his shoulder and head ... With a strange voice he says many times, "Jealousy, jealousy". In the name of Jesus I command this spirit to leave Wayne's body. His whole body vibrates ... Again a strange voice comes out of his mouth. I bind this spirit in the name of Jesus and command it to leave Wayne ... Moments later he gets up exhausted but shining bright... [He] gives all honour to Jesus as Lord... He dissociates himself from all bonds through his ancestors. (Hannuscheck 1995:7)

Testimonies

Testifying to the saving grace and transforming power of God in one's life is a prominent feature of evangelical church services. Both the

⁴⁵ Sister missions which sprang from the same roots at La Perouse, NSW at the turn of the 20th century (see Chapter 3).

⁴⁶ The missionary newsletter of the AIM mission churches.

UAM and AOG churches in Halls Creek feature testimonies in their church services. Testimonies in white evangelical churches are fairly formulaic: one speaks of one's pre-Christian existence, an existence characterised (especially in highly individualistic Western societies) by a sense of purposelessness and emptiness. The saving moment may be described: a moment when one's whole being is suffused with God's love and one's fragmented self is completed and made whole. Finally, the message is extended to the listeners: God can do the same for you.

While younger Aboriginal Christians appear to have mastered the art of testimony telling, giving testimonies with "before" and "after" sequences, the majority of AOG testimonies are about healing. What is desired above all is a strong and invulnerable self. People will say, "God is my doctor", and go on to relate a healing story. A strong and healthy body is not an indication of a healthy individualised soul, but a healthy social being (evidenced by a flow of positive reciprocity) with the world around one.

These stories also have "before" and "after" sequences. Before, one's body was weak and depleted, clothed in rags and constantly sick. Today one's body and one's social self are strong and purposeful, spreading out into the world to hold one's family together, and to create ties of harmony between family groups. There is also a search for wholeness, not of one's contained and bounded self as in Western conversions, but of one's being in the world:

I'm a black woman. I gotta stand strong for my family. I gotta talk strong [to *gardiya* on behalf of my family]. I got the Holy Spirit now. I'm strong [i.e. since I've been going AOG way]. I bin tell all them [fighting] boys, "You should all be mate

now. Not enemy. We are all one. We got one Father. You should all be mate now. Not fighting". (MJ)

UAM testimonies also have to do with flow. The majority of UAM testimonies are about apologising. The Devil tempts people to argue and fight. God prompts the Christian to go and apologise to the other person and heal the rift between them. They will have no peace in their hearts until they do this. God gives them the strength to put things right with the other person.

Some people link this sequence of events to traditional notions about binji and country. As discussed in Chapter 1, Gabriel Jordan believes that if she harbours bad feelings in her binji for someone, that person will become sick. This is because her binji is linked to the Sturt Creek waterhole which never dries up or loses its potency. The country will pick up her feelings and act on them. But if she apologises to the person this action will break the nexus between holding bad feelings and causing sickness.

Summary

In this chapter I have looked at experiences of church-going in Halls Creek including the relationships between Aboriginal people and the white church leaderships. Sectarian rivalry among the three churches (today downplayed by Catholic and UAM leaders) continues to be fuelled by the aggressively evangelistic AOG church. I also continue an analysis of the Aboriginal body (both traditional and Christianising) through the rituals of life and death.

AOG Pentecostalism, because it is an American-based denomination with roots in Black American Christianity, has a style of interaction and communion (with the spirit world) that is attractive to Aboriginal people. Its worship style, which incorporates singing, dancing and other bodily actions, employs all the faculties of the human body to generate a flow of energy and enthusiasm amongst the worshippers.

There is, however, a disjunction between the AOG worship style and its doctrinal teaching. While its worship style is bodily expressive and participatory, its strictly dualistic doctrinal stance is earth and body-hating. This contradiction, seemingly unrecognised by the AOG leadership, creates conflict between Aboriginal people and themselves. Chapter 7 will examine the basic conflict in values between Western Christianity and Aboriginal world views.

CHAPTER 7

CONFLICTS BETWEEN ABORIGINES AND MISSIONARIES

Although in the East Kimberley, Aboriginal people's beliefs, practices and values are changing as a result of colonisation, missionisation and more recently, incorporation into the European secular education system, there is a basic conflict of values between Western Christianity and Aboriginal (whether Christian or non-Christian) world views which manifests itself in all three churches in Halls Creek.

This conflict of values, which derives from people's historically-constituted ontologies, politics and moralities, is not unique to Aboriginal-white missionary relationships in Australia or to missionary situations in colonised countries generally. It is a conflict of a kind that has a very long human history, and which has been recorded for posterity in the literature of the West.

The Oresteia, a trilogy of plays by Aeschylus (circa 472 BC), reveals the tumultuous transition from a kin-based morality to a city-state morality.¹ In the *Agamemnon*, in the midst of war, both men and gods pursue glory and honour for family and fatherland, exacting blood revenge without mercy. In the *Libation-Bearers*, the Olympian gods, in fear of the avenging Furies, command the protagonist to avenge the deaths of his family members. But in the final play,

¹ Rather than presenting these two points of view as fixed bi-polar opposites, with speakers lined up on either side, a more realistic picture will show that independent and even contradictory views can exist simultaneously (in the same people). One should perhaps, following Bakhtin (1984), present these divergent views as existing in a state of "polyphony" or "dialogism".

Eumenides, the Olympian gods battle the Furies in an attempt to institute a new regime of civil order and justice. The protagonist flees to Athens where he is tried by a jury of Athenian citizens, and Athena charms the gathering Furies, converting them from avenging *daimones* to the defenders of city-state values (Littman 1974:24-26).

Aristotle, operating from the vantage point of a city-state polity and ethos, complained that ways of being deriving from local, kin-based cosmologies were "simple and barbaric":

Greeks used to go around armed with swords, and they used to buy wives from one another: and there are certainly other ancient customs that are extremely stupid. In general, all human beings seek not *the way of their ancestors*, but *the good*. (Aristotle 1268a39 [italics added], cited in Charlesworth 1997:89)

Charlesworth (1997), a contemporary philosopher, following Aristotle, goes on to state that while these (ancestor-based) behaviours may have been acceptable in the past, people today should be concerned with behaviours deriving from a universal morality. Such behaviours he believes "make human beings more fully human" (p 90), a view to which I could not subscribe.

In the Germanic epic, *Beowulf*, a saga composed of layers of divergent and competing voices, Christianity becomes a key player, promoting city-state morality and values in opposition to the heroic "pagan" Germanic voices (Earl 1991:65-69; Frantzen 1990: 181-188).²

² I am not arguing here that the conflict between missionaries and Aborigines in East Kimberley is a simple matter of pagan/warrior versus Hellenic/citizen. As Caputo says of his Jew/Greek (or heteromorphic/heteronomic) distinctions, we must beware of instituting still another tiresome binarity which will eventually become unstrung. Factual life is a messy affair... Binary terms are inevitably contaminated by each other, each inwardly disturbed by the other. (Caputo 1993:63)

Bakhtin (1981:114-119) points to a growing sense of individualism in later hellenistic novels, for example, Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* which chronicles the life and personal transformation of a wandering adventurer. This novel reveals a change in people's attribution of motivational forces, from external chance to personal psychology, and in ethics from corporate to individual liability and retribution.

Although Aboriginal people make claims for individual autonomy in the face of all-encompassing kinship networks, the individual is not considered to be a unique and absolute value as in modern Western societies. Comaroff and Comaroff, in their analysis of Christianity and colonialism in South Africa, discuss two distinct styles of individualism which are sustained by "fundamentally different ontological roots". The Tswana concept of personhood was tied to "an ontology according to which persons, spirit forces, and material objects participated in and could affect each other". Such an ontology, which I would refer to as an ontology of consubstantiality, is

a far cry from the ontology at the base of modern Western individualism, in which spirit and matter, people and

Aboriginal leaders at Yirrkala in Arnhem Land asserted it was possible for Yolngu to be both good citizens and good kinspersons:

being citizens meant not the freedom to abrogate certain [kin-based] laws, but the obligation to behave so white Australians could see Yolngu were sensible and well educated people [and thus capable of implementing their own law at the village level]. (Williams 1987:133)

(It must be stated here, however, that in white Kimberley towns, Aboriginal people have not been given the opportunity at the polis level to assert their own laws.)

Reid (1983:116) also talks of clan leaders' efforts at Yirrkala to reduce the incidence of sorcery accusations and family feuding:

I am *djakamirri* [the one who cares] for the clan, the law and the people... When people die I don't immediately blame someone and create trouble. I think the cause is illness... I feel that as long as I am alive I can reason with people, but if I drop dead people will start blaming others and all my work will be spoiled.

Maddy Jarra's testimony in the Halls Creek AOG church (see Chapter 6) also reveals a desire to curtail kin-based conflict and promote intergroup harmony.

objects, were definitively set apart, and in which every man and woman was responsible, on their own account and in their own right, for their spiritual, social, and material situation in a radically disenchanted universe. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:144)

Williams (1987:149-153) talks about a conflict of laws (that is, European Australian law and Yolngu law) at Yirrkala in eastern Arnhem Land. She states:

A fundamental source of conflict was inherent in the opposition between the common law value of 'blind justice',³ and the Yolngu value of 'fitness', expressed in spatial terms - topographically in terms of relations to land and socially in terms in kinship. (p 150)

Strang (1997:178), in her study of human-environmental relations in southwestern Cape York Peninsula, notes that while white pastoralists and Aboriginal people share a common geographic area, "they inhabit two different 'landscapes of knowledge'". She affirms Morphy's (1994) observation that Aboriginal discourse "focuses more strongly on specifics than generalities, reflecting the continuity of their knowledge base and its geographically contained location in the land". White Australian socio-cultural experiences, on the other hand, are "reflected in a universal discourse, necessitating hierarchies, generalities and abstraction" (Strang 1997:198).

In Halls Creek, there are many dimensions to this conflict of values. Although Aboriginal people have been incorporated into European Australian politico-economic structures as enfranchised citizens, their status in white Kimberley towns is extremely marginal. This is most evident in statistics of alcohol use and incarceration in the Kimberley.

³ I would call this a city-state value of universal justice.

A survey of alcohol use in the Kimberley by Hunter, Hall and Spargo (1991) showed that 76% of males and 46% of females in the Aboriginal population were current drinkers. Those who lived in the towns were more likely to be constant drinkers while those living in remote communities without easy access to alcohol were invariably episodic drinkers (Hunter 1993:115.116). A follow-up survey showed a strong correlation between alcohol use and police lock-up, and the risk of lock-up was higher among drinkers who were of full rather than mixed descent. 81% of Aboriginal men and 37% of Aboriginal women in the Kimberley have been locked up in police cells (Hall, Hunter and Spargo 1994:57).

A 1988 state-wide survey found the arrest rate of Aboriginal people to be 43 times greater than for non-Aborigines. The Kimberley towns of Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing (with a combined population of less than 3000 people) accounted for 35% of the drunkenness arrest rates in the state (Midford 1991:19). Public drunkenness was decriminalised in Western Australia in 1990 and redefined as a social and welfare problem requiring sobering-up facilities rather than police lock-up. However, in 1992, the level of over-representation of Aboriginal people in police custody in Western Australia had risen to 51.9 (Ayres 1994:18).

In matters of juvenile justice in Western Australia, the Aboriginal youth custody rate in 1992 was 33.5 per 1000 compared with the national Aboriginal custody rate of 5.2 per 1000. The Young Offenders Bill of 1994 which increased the rate of Aboriginal youth incarceration in Western Australia is in breach of the international prohibition of

racial discrimination and runs counter to recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Hall 1994:22).

Aboriginal people who are fully aware of their precarious political and economic status in white Kimberley towns, rely on family/kinship networks rather than bureaucratic institutions for daily survival and security. Traditional values, particularly kinship values of balanced reciprocity and justice, remain strong. These values are manifested in child-rearing practices, styles of hospitality, participation in indigenous exchange systems, the relationship between husband and wife, family organisation in times of crisis and notions of liability and retribution.

Aboriginal people in Halls Creek do not regard themselves as polis beings, that is, as citizens who participate equally in local and regional decision-making processes, who may hold public office and who share the civic values of productivity, efficiency, temperance and orderly behaviour.

In recent years, mixed descent people who gained bureaucratic expertise in the Aboriginal organisations of the 1980s, have begun to take up public positions in mainstream local and regional government, for example, as Shire Counsellors. However, they generally represent themselves and not the full-descent people who are still excluded from public office and representation because of poor educational achievement. Young men in particular, far from developing the values of civic order and harmony, maintain a warrior ethos.⁴ This ethos feeds on continuing factionalism between different

⁴ This warrior ethos is, of course, not unique to an Aboriginal male subculture. White male subcultures often share similar values. Strang (1997:166) talks about the rites of passage that young white stockmen go through in North Queensland:

land-language groups in East Kimberley, which has been exacerbated in recent years as a result of some groups acquiring pastoral land over which they have no traditional or historical claim.⁵

The conflict of values between Western Christianity and Aboriginal world views manifests itself differently in the three churches in Halls Creek. The reasons for this are historical. The UAM church is composed mainly of mixed descent Aboriginal people who have lived in the town of Halls Creek from the mid 1950s. One requirement for their status as townspeople was an expressed willingness to deny their Aboriginality and live like white people. These UAM Christians who long ago discarded their traditional religious ceremonies, are now in the process of discarding their cultural values through a European reading of "Biblical principles".

As discussed earlier (see Chapter 3), the UAM leadership is interested in developing internal discipline in the lives of Aboriginal Christians, rather than applying coercive external measures. Christians are encouraged to apply Biblical principles to their lives, particularly in times of uncertainty and indecision, and in this way will develop strong and cohesive internal structures for regulating dispositions and behaviour. However, as the following examples show, there is a point at which these mixed descent Christians refuse further acculturation.

The conflict of values between Aborigines and European missionaries is most intense in the AOG church. The AOG leadership espouses a

the young stockworkers are placed [in the station hierarchy], principally, to be heroes, achieving manhood in a combative rite of passage.

⁵ For example, the Lamboo Gunian group's acquisition of Koongie Park Station, on an area of land traditionally occupied by Gija people, and worked as a cattle station for a number of generations by Gija and Jaru people (see Sullivan 1989:220-222).

hellenistic dualism which divides reality into two separate and unequal spheres, privileging the spiritual over the material. However, despite their frequent protestations that the land belongs to the Devil and will eventually disappear in a conflagration (see Chapter 1), AOG adherents speak with great affection of station life, are knowledgeable about the land and its seasonal products, and become dismayed and anxious when sacred sites are interfered with.⁶ Most AOG adherents are today affiliated with groups which are making land claims. Aboriginal people in the AOG church do not tend to see themselves in terms of Paul's Christianised Universal Subject. Paul's efforts to erase ethnicity and descent as crucial markers of human identity in order to incorporate all humanity as one into Christ's spiritual body (see Boyarin 1994:6-8), have not achieved complete success in Halls Creek Christianity.

The goal of Catholic evangelisation traditionally has been the founding of Christian communities rather than the production of individual Christian souls. Cultures and individuals are Christianised simultaneously through the practice rather than the intellection of Catholic traditions. Liturgy, sacraments and oral traditions have therefore been given more prominence than the preaching of the (written) Word.

⁶ According to AOG missionaries, Jesus' blood does not flow through the country (see Chapter 3). But Dreaming beings have not forsaken the land. Galaru (water snakes) continue to inhabit the deep water holes in Gija and Jaru country. Caroline Pool, the baptising water for the UAM mob, is also the home of a well known water snake. He was initially frightened by Christian baptisms and swallowed a horse in retaliation. Today he favours the Christian mob and tends mainly to swallow sinners. Spirit beings, today taking the form of donkeys and gorillas as well as dogs and native species, inhabit rocky outcrops and groves of trees. Male and female spirit beings try to seduce straying or vulnerable people away from the human world into the world of spirits. (See Kolig 1987:64-80 for an account of the spirit beings which inhabit the Fitzroy Valley region of the Kimberley.)

Rather than looking for traces of God in "archaic" religions (a practice which has become popular in Protestant missionary evangelisation), Catholics seek to affirm the presence of God in all human activities that are carried out in good faith and good conscience. For this reason traditional cultural practices (and beliefs/values) are not denigrated as unchristian. Rather, Aborigines are encouraged to meet God through the practice of their traditions.

Family and child-rearing

The UAM leadership's position on the husband/wife relationship was expressed during a marriage ceremony at the UAM church:

It is not good for man to be alone. God made him a help-meet. Eve was taken from Adam's rib, taken from the man's side. The woman is not to be trodden on. She was made to be close to the man's side and to his heart. (KF)

Spencer Toon, a UAM adherent, maintains that before he became a stable Christian,⁷ he used to treat his wife as a slave. Now, after receiving Christian teaching and applying it to his life, he accepts her as his help-meet.

However, although the UAM emphasizes the complementary and auxillary nature of the wife's role, accepting the Biblical injunction that the male is to be the head of the household, most UAM households are headed by matriarchs who hold together up to four generations of descendents. They are frequently the effective guardians

⁷ As a new Christian he would repeatedly backslide, "falling back" to old drinking and fighting habits. This is a common pattern in the Christianisation of Aboriginal people in Halls Creek.

not only of their grandchildren but also their greatgrandchildren. A number of younger wives have begun to make an independent reading of Biblical principles relating to marriage. While it is their duty to submit to their husbands, this is only possible if the husband has submitted himself to God and is a credible representative of God in the household.

The AOG leadership promotes a hierarchical family structure with marked gender role distinctions. The man is the head of the household and the wife must submit herself to his leadership. AOG women's meetings emphasize the subordinate role of women in the Christian household. The woman should cook and clean for her husband and not argue with him when he wants something done.

However, as in UAM households, the women are the most responsible members of their families and frequently become the effective heads of households when their husbands "fall back" to a drinking life style. This is distressing to the AOG pastors who do not approve of women acting independently of men. The AOG responds to this situation by organising special men's meetings and by making women responsible for their husbands' return to church while still insisting on their passivity in relation to men:

Women, you don't even have to open your mouths. If goodness shines out of you, you will draw your husbands back to the Lord. (Pastor Daniel)

The UAM leadership promotes disciplined child-rearing practices, congruent with the Biblical injunction, "Spare the rod and spoil the child". UAM pastors believe that Aboriginal child-rearing was originally disciplined, but with break-down of traditional authority

structures and widespread dependence on alcohol, parental and grandparental authority has ceased to be effective.

A white woman married to an ex-Moola Bulla resident found that the greatest difficulties in her marriage related to different, and at times opposing, child-rearing practices. Alison tried to provide a disciplined ("firm but caring") home environment to facilitate the inculcation of Christian goals and values in her children. She would try to make the children obedient to her will (using Biblical support for this practice). Spencer would invariably subvert her efforts, allowing the child to exercise its own will and using a traditional Aboriginal maxim to support his view: "Life will be hard enough for them later on. Let them be children now".

According to Hamilton (1981) who studied the child-rearing practices of the Anbarra of northcentral Arnhem Land, traditional child-raising methods are strikingly permissive. Children's whims are almost always indulged. It is the adult who must take responsibility while the child is given freedom of expression. If a child vents anger against a parent, the adults will laugh it off, and even express admiration at the child's assertiveness (p 100-149).

There are no recriminations for disobedience; in fact, there is no idea that a child should obey, for in the normal course of life 'the child will do what he wants'. (Hamilton 1981:78)

Coercive methods for structuring behaviour are brought to bear only after the end of childhood (p 153). In the Western Desert region, Tonkinson (1991:83) notes that:

Adults show extreme indulgence toward children of all ages, and a crying child can be sure of a quick response from its mother and others nearby, who pacify it by acceding to its demands... Children are free to do very much as they like most of the time and are given very few explicit instructions by adults.

My own observations of child-rearing in East Kimberley corroborate both Hamilton's and Tonkinson's research.

In AOG households, just as women should submit to their husbands, children should submit to their parents. The European leadership insists that children attend the adult church services, but does not allow them to play or make a noise. Children, like adults, must listen to the Word of God. If they are too young to understand the message, the Word of God is able to go straight to their hearts, by-passing the intellect.

However, the Devil is easily able to distract children from listening, and parents must be on their guard against this. Parents are told to flog their children in church if they disrupt the services. Pastors will address noisy children in the same manner that they address Satan:

This is not a kindergarten. It is the House of God. Shut up and sit down in the Name of Jesus. (Pastor Daniel)

Outside of church, however, children are not taught submission and obedience, but are given lessons in self-reliance. Children are taught to "square up" moral imbalances between themselves and other children and to defend their siblings against outside aggression. Children learn to resist an incipient command hierarchy by ignoring parental

demands or displacing them on to younger children, and when pressed, by making colourful assertions of autonomy.

Kinship values

For people inculcated with Western city-state values and morality, the operation of a family/kin-based morality within the borders of a civil society is viewed as anti-social and disruptive to civic order and harmony. In Halls Creek, “negative” manifestations of a kin-based morality, such as family feuding, are interpreted by the UAM leadership as sin (when practised by non-Christian Aborigines) or as spiritual immaturity (when practised by Christians).

For the UAM pastor, the most spiritually mature people in his church are those who have loosened themselves from fierce attachment and loyalty to close kin, for example, those who do not take on their children’s and grandchildren’s fights as their own. These same people are also less likely to exhibit the “negative” emotions of jealousy, anger and grudge-holding.

A young male adherent of the UAM, who was subjected to a threat of family-based revenge from an older AOG adherent, discussed this problem with a UAM missionary. He interpreted this threat in theological terms, that is, as a spiritual problem rather than a manifestation of political and cultural difference. A solution was also discussed in theological terms. The AOG adherent was perceived as a weak and ineffectual Christian who was unable to demonstrate the power of God in her life because she failed to submit to the Word of God and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

However, even for UAM adherents, despite their disapproval of “negative” manifestations of family-based morality, kinship values remain strong, and are a cause of conflict between missionaries and themselves. At a church business meeting, a UAM missionary wanted to discipline a church member (on a matter of Biblical principle), and expected support from a church elder. He found himself meeting resistance and non-cooperation from the elder who was the brother-in-law of the man accused. On this occasion at least, a kinship principle (that one should stand up for one’s own kinsmen, whether they are right or wrong) carried more weight than a Biblical principle.

The UAM leadership stresses that God is a God of order. When people become Christians, they should look after their houses, control their children and not incur debts all over town. Christianity helps people to discipline themselves to carry out tasks and to set goals for their lives, because Christianity is goal-directed. A church elder, speaking at a UAM Christian Convention at Fitzroy Crossing, was outlining the Biblical requirements for a teacher of God’s Word. Such a man should have only one wife, look after his home and family, and discipline his children, for how can he teach others if his own family is out of control. However, the speaker’s final comment, that “I won’t let my children mess up my name outside,” reveals the persistence of a family/kin-based morality, a morality that is concerned above all with family reputation.

AOG pastors complain that Halls Creek Christians only witness to their families. They are not concerned about those outside their circle of kin. Such an attitude is out of line with God’s universal plan of

salvation, and with Jesus' instructions to his followers (Matthew 28:19). AOG Christians also stand up for and protect their kin against outsiders even when they are in the wrong. When there are disputes in the church, AOG members will take their relatives' side against the pastors. If a pastor offends one member of their family, they may take their whole family out of the church. Aboriginal Christians fail to carry out AOG instructions to separate themselves from nonchristian relatives and not allow them entry to their houses. At times of crisis such as illness or death, family solidarity becomes all important, and family directives override church affiliation.

Aboriginal kinship values and forms of authority are generally supported by the Catholic church. Women are honoured for their "valiant attempts to keep their families together" (Father Martyn, Halls Creek). However, conflicts arise when the Catholic priests and nuns feel that their adherents are being drawn away from the church (especially by non-churchgoing whites) to the growing number of well-organised traditional activities taking place in the Kimberley and elsewhere in Australia and overseas.⁸ Aboriginal organisations such as the Kimberley Land Council, Kimberley Language Resource Centre and the Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (which employ white people at an administrative level) have better facilities for organising and transporting large groups of people than the churches do today. Despite the Kimberley Catholic Diocese' official stance towards

⁸ For example, during a nine month period in 1993, Kutjungka women from Balgo (Wirrimanu) community attended law meetings at Jigalong, Utopia, Mornington Island, and Doon Doon (an Aboriginal-owned cattle station near Kununurra). In February 1991, a group of senior Balgo women travelled to Canberra to dance at the opening of the 'Aboriginal Art and Spirituality' exhibition. They took the Nkarra Nkarra song cycle to the Sixth Festival of Pacific Art and Culture in the Cook Islands in October 1992. And they took the Mina-Mina, Tjipari and Nkarra Nkarra song cycles to Sydney in December 1993, exhibiting paintings, dancing, and teaching performance skills (Watson 1996:6,99).

Aboriginal religious and cultural activities (a stance of tolerance and acceptance), in practice, they often perceive these other groups as rival organisations.

Work and money

Despite the fact that the majority of Aboriginal people are unable to find work in white Kimberley towns, the UAM leadership promotes a Protestant work and money management ethic, stressing the Biblical principle of (individual) accountability:

We have lots of talks at church meetings about the use of money. Christians should use their money wisely. They shouldn't bludge off other people. When we invite [church] people to come on outreach to other communities, many of them come just to get meat. (Dell Abbey, wife of UAM pastor)

A few young people who have dissociated themselves to some extent from family networks (because of marriage to a white partner, or movement to another town, for example) reply to requests for money in the following way:

I can't give you money. I'm accountable for how I spend my money. I am responsible for my own family.⁹ I'm the breadwinner. I have to pay for my children's education and school uniforms. (SO)

For the majority of UAM Christians, however, family networks are a form of social security, and one would isolate oneself from them at one's peril.

⁹ Interpreted here as one's family of procreation, that is, the nuclear family.

In matters of hospitality:

When you're in my country, I gotta look after you. When I'm in your country, you gotta look after me. (LP)

You shouldn't ask travellers for money. (DW)

Travellers generally travel light. The roads which, in the early days, carried not only countrymen and allied groups, exchange goods and ceremonies, but also raiding parties and other unwelcome guests, are often perceived as dangerous. One may encounter strangers or enemies (in human or spirit form), and it is wise to be relatively unencumbered and ready for action. The reason for travel may be because one's own country is temporarily depleted of food or water. Those who are sitting on their own country should supply travellers with what they need.

Christians often use church travel to other areas as occasions to visit and avail themselves of the hospitality of relatives elsewhere. The hospitality will be returned when these relatives visit Halls Creek. European missionaries, who do not place this practice within its cultural and political context, fail to see its value as a long term form of social security. They are ashamed to see Christians who are travelling in the ministry of the gospel and representing Christ to unbelievers, "bludging" off the very people they have come to minister to.

The UAM pastor made a ruling that when Christians travel to other areas to attend conventions or participate in outreach services, they were to take presents to their hosts, and were not to bring anything back. This effectively reverses Aboriginal notions of hospitality, and

while this new practice may take place on UAM church trips, it has not been extended into other areas of Aboriginal social life.

Because of its belief that we are living in the Last Days, the AOG leadership discourages Aboriginal people from gaining secular employment and building up earthly possessions. Christians in these days should be working for the Lord, and in Halls Creek this may include driving around the town in church buses, witnessing to people in the street and in their homes, inviting people to church, working on church building projects, and transporting AOG members to and from church meetings and outreach services.

On occasions when a station manager has driven into Yardgee Reserve¹⁰ to pick up men for stockwork, Bro. Phillip has intervened saying, "You can't take these boys. They're working for me". However, Aboriginal people in Halls Creek use station work as a method of "drying out". When they become tired of the treadmill of intoxication, lock-up, injury and sickness, they will seek out work on one of the surrounding stations. This work is seasonal and short-term, as Aboriginal people no longer live and work continuously on cattle stations in East Kimberley. AOG adherents will work on cattle stations, but it is usually only when they have stopped attending church as a result of "falling back" to a grog life style.

The majority of AOG adherents receive Social Security payments which are redistributed throughout the town via an indigenous exchange system. Because there is never enough money to go around,

¹⁰ One of the two reserves established outside the town boundaries when Moola Bulla government settlement was sold and the Aboriginal inhabitants evicted by the new pastoral lessees.

Aboriginal people may appear to be obsessed with money. People spend long hours waiting outside the Post Office for their Social Security cheques to be sorted and handed out. Pension Day is particularly trying to the AOG leadership. If it falls on a day when there is a church service in the evening, people will arrive late for church or fail to attend altogether. Even those who are present tend to have their minds elsewhere. Drunk relations will walk into the service to demand money from churchgoers. There may be fights in the church. Such an atmosphere leads the missionaries to suspect Satanic influences. Devils and demons are believed to be particularly active in Halls Creek and in the church on Pension Day. "Pension Day spirits" lead people away from the Lord to run after pension cheques, money and grog.

"Money worries" is a fairly constant theme in AOG sermons. Because Aboriginal people can spend many daylight hours in subsistence activities despite receiving Social Security payments,¹¹ their energy is often not available for church projects. Anything that interferes with the work of God is believed by the AOG missionaries to be Satanic in origin:

A lot of Christians are battling over money. They haven't got victory over money. There are Christians who don't even tithe. If we allow finance to dictate our actions and plans, we are following the spirit of this world. There are a lot of Christians who owe a lot of money. God hates debt and usury. Those who owe money will not go on to the Rapture. (Bro. Phillip)

¹¹ These may include walking around the town asking appropriate people for money or meat, playing cards, visiting the rubbish dump for household amenities, gathering bush fruit and vegetables in season, hunting animal food when guns and vehicles are available, and gold fossicking in the wet season.

Card playing is generally not available to Protestant Christians as a subsistence activity, or as a means of redistributing money.¹² But Christians will, when necessary, frequent the various "card places" around town or out of town, to find out who is winning and to demand money from relatives. This money may be used to finance church travel or other church activities.

Gold-bearing alluvial deposits can still be found in East Kimberley today. During the wet season, Aboriginal people become keen gold fossickers. They may ask *mamu/juwarri* (spirits of the dead) to direct them to gold deposits. Or they may ask God. God put the gold there in the first place:

They say [to *mamu/juwarri*], "You gotta show me big gold. Don't hide im. You gotta gimme some". Christians say, "O Lord, show me the gold. I gotta find it for you". But they don't give it to him. (HS)

The UAM and AOG church leaders do not approve of gold fossicking, particularly if it becomes an addictive activity, that is, if people go out every day to look for gold and neglect their other duties. For the UAM, earning one's living is more meritorious than depending on chance gold finds. For the AOG, anything that takes one away from church activities cannot be God-ordained.

Gold hunting can also be a dangerous activity quite apart from church disapproval. If someone makes a large find, the owners of the gold (that is, the *mamu/juwarri*) can become jealous and steal the person's

¹² Some UAM and AOG church members play cards, but normally only when they are away from Halls Creek, or when the church pastor is away.

spirit away from them. In Halls Creek, a number of people's illnesses and deaths have been attributed to an inordinate love of gold.¹³

As well as disapproving of money and material possessions on the grounds that they distract people from Last Day's living, the AOG leadership espouses a hellenistic dualism which divides reality into a higher, purified realm of spirit and a lower, organic material realm. The AOG pastors complain that Aboriginal people's goals (even when Christianised) are basically materialistic, and for this reason they make little progress in the spiritual life. Their prayers rarely rise above the level of their bellies. They fail to align their prayer goals with God's purposes which are universal in scope and eternal in their consequences. Praying for church buildings, a new organ and tyres for vehicles will not worry Satan as all of these will pass away. Saving souls which are eternal, not earthly, is the great work of God's people on earth.

When there is too much backsliding and absenteeism in the church, the AOG pastors promote fasting, a dualistic ascetic practice, as a way of achieving spiritual results:

The reason the church is not full tonight is that Christians are not submitting their lives to God. People settle for second-rate Christianity. AOG Christians turn away from their Pentecostal banquet, and sin and multiply their sins. Turning to deceitful, hideous things of sin. But these days are gone you drunkards, you wanderers, you card players. We are going to have two days of prayer and fasting, starting on Monday. We are going to start afflicting the flesh. (Pastor Daniel).

¹³ A woman who became lost in the bush while gold-hunting was believed to have been led astray with malicious intent by a strange spirit. A search party found her in the early hours of the morning sitting on top of a hill. Christians who had been praying for her safety claimed that a light from heaven was shining down upon her, making her visible to the search party. This was God's answer to their prayers.

Death and mortuary practices

As discussed in Chapter 6, Aboriginal Christians continue to carry out a range of practices associated with death which are considered by the Protestant missionaries to be unchristian, and which therefore need to be discarded. These practices involve liminal participation in the state of the dead, avoiding the deceased's ghost (in its immediate postmortem state), discovery of the deceased's murderer and avenging the deceased's death.

Protestant missionaries believe that people who continue these practices are not trusting the Lord in their situation, and are not holding on to Biblical truths which they have been taught. Souls of the dead do not remain on the earth to haunt the living. Their destination is heaven or hell. If the deceased was a Christian, their soul and their future will be in God's hands. Aboriginal people do not need to look for and punish an appointed murderer. If the mourners are Christians, God will comfort their souls with the knowledge that the deceased is no longer suffering, but is resting in the Lord. They will see their loved one again.

However, Aboriginal views about death are informed by their understanding of Christianity which differs from the missionaries' understanding in some important details. Christianity is about "following a way", not about transforming and purifying one's "inner being". If a Christian fails to follow the way properly (for example, they may be following two ways: "God's way" and the "Devil's way"), their soul will not reach heaven. They will remain on the earth and

eventually be reincarnated. Their spirit must be treated with proper caution by the living, and their death must be avenged.

People whom missionaries accept have gone to heaven (because they gave their heart to the Lord sometime before their death), are believed by Aboriginal people to be still around on the earth because, regardless of their actions at the altar (that is, giving their heart to the Lord), they were going two ways at the time of their death.

Spiritual power

In white evangelical church services, the penitent is encouraged to go forward to the altar to repent of their sins, receive forgiveness, and renew their covenant with God. In white Pentecostal church services, the Christian also goes forward to receive power to equip them for their task of saving souls. God's love and forgiving grace are universal and salvific, and his power is available to all who are engaged in the great universal plan of salvation.

In the Halls Creek AOG church, the altar is a site of conflict between the missionaries and Aboriginal adherents. As previously discussed, Aboriginal people see the power available at the altar in local/protective rather than in universal/salvific terms. Aboriginal people living in Halls Creek must engage with a confusing array of colonial and post-colonial institutions in which they experience marked dissymmetries of power. Their greatest perceived need is to strengthen (and immunise against potent unknown forces) their body-spirit which is not an individualised and bounded entity but a dynamic interactive force.

Although in Halls Creek Aboriginal notions of life-force or spirit have changed as a result of missionary teaching,¹⁴ they have not transformed the human body into a site for the operation of a Pythagorean-Platonic spirit/matter dualism in which body and soul exist as ontologically separate and mutually antagonistic forces. Within the Pythagorean-Platonic schema, the soul which is a small portion of the divine displaced from the celestial realm, must be purified of earthly desires and appetites before it can reunite with its true spiritual home. Soul purification is an important theme of AOG teaching:

God says he will come as a living stone. He desires to make us perfect. He measures you against the flawless, spotless Jesus Christ. And only those who let the chisel fall again and again, until you become flawless and spotless, will make it to glory. (Pastor Daniel)

Aboriginal conduct at the altar does not conform to AOG missionary expectations. They do not bring to the altar an individualised and psychologised soul burdened by guilt because of sins committed. They do not come to repent of sins and seek forgiveness and cleansing by the blood of the Lamb.¹⁵ What they require from God is not soul purification but the strengthening and enlivening of their life-force.

AOG pastors complain that although most AOG adherents have been Christians for a number of years, they have not moved one rung up

¹⁴ See section titled **Life-Forces** in Chapter 5.

¹⁵ Gunson, in his study of evangelical missionary endeavour in the Pacific Islands, reports that the missionaries were surprised and frustrated at Islander conversions. Islanders failed to display "abject misery" on learning that they were sinners and to suffer feelings of guilt and remorse over their past deeds. Rather than questioning evangelical models of conversion and notions of the self, missionary Ellis came to the conclusion that "the emotions of the islanders [were not] as acute as those of civilised people" (Gunson 1978:223).

the spiritual ladder. They have not submitted their wills to God and allowed their consciences to be trained by the Holy Spirit. They cannot distinguish between clean and unclean, and between good and evil. By now they should be teachers of the Word (and living on the meat of the Word, not the milk), but they are still at the level of babies requiring to be breast fed.¹⁶

There are people going around and around in circles in the things of God. They come to the altar, go home and read their Bible and pray, come back to church, come to the altar, but they don't go anywhere. They turn to the right, then they turn to the left. They wander off after jealousy, bad attitudes against their pastor and against each other. They turn back to card playing. They turn back to lies. They turn to the left. Left is away from God. (Bro. Phillip)

Ancestral art

Issues seen to be conflictual by one set of missionaries may come to be seen as unproblematic by a new generation of missionaries. Likewise, issues that once were believed to be firmly resolved and were treated as a closed book, may re-emerge in a later period as dilemmas requiring renegotiation. In the late 1980s, a UAM adherent who was in the process of acquiring land by pastoral excision, became involved in Aboriginal art and craft work as a way of generating an income to develop his community. The paintings depicted stories from his country, some of which featured the travels of ancestral snakes.

¹⁶ Doomadgee missionaries expressed similar sentiments, advising prospective workers and visitors to the mission that:

[You] may well have a conscience, which is affected over some things you may see them do - such as smoking - and may not understand that their conscience is not as tender as your own and must wait till they grow in moral grace. (Bedford and Rossow 1960:4, cited in Trigger 1992:69)

A UAM *gardiya* who chanced upon these paintings, expressed shock and dismay that a Christian could get involved (wittingly or unwittingly) in reproducing Satanic symbols. In response to this encounter, Louis initially threw out all his canvasses and paints, declaring in a testimony in church that he had become too involved with art work, and the Lord was revealing to him that he should give it up. He said he was not worshipping the art, but he had become too preoccupied with it, to the detriment of other (more Christian) activities.¹⁷

After various white shop-keepers and small business people in Halls Creek expressed concern that Louis was no longer producing artwork for the local tourist trade, he took the matter to the UAM pastor. The pastor (a new generation missionary) felt he did not have the right to impose his own personal views on to Louis, and asked for time to consult the Bible and pray about the matter.

At the end of this time, the matter was again discussed in church. John carefully presented his opinion that there was nothing wrong with Aboriginal paintings as such. The desert dot paintings (the style Louis had adopted) were often aesthetically beautiful. The artwork provided an income for Louis and his family. This was in line with the Biblical principle of earning one's living by honest work. However, the content of the paintings needed careful attention. Paintings depicting Aborigines engaged in hunting and gathering activities were clearly acceptable. But paintings which celebrated and promoted a power that

¹⁷ It is ironic that Louis made this statement while standing beside a painting of a Christmas tree displayed in the front of the UAM church. Such trees are presumably no longer "worshipped" by Europeans but are still given "a place" in European Christians' lives, and even in their churches.

is not of God cannot be glorifying to him. Because John was uncertain at this time whether the snakes were usurping God's sovereignty, he asked Louis to pray further about the matter.

Louis returned to his art and craft work, but avoided painting ancestral snakes. Again, white people intervened - this time they were fellow employees of Aboriginal organisations such as the Kimberley Language Resource Centre. Louis was taken to task for denigrating ancestral snakes. The snakes in Aboriginal religion-culture are not evil. They are rainmakers and life-givers and should be respected as such. The matter was resolved (at least temporarily) when Louis had a dream that he attributed to God. The dream was about Noah's Ark and revealed all the animals entering the Ark prior to the great Flood. Amongst the animals were a pair of snakes. God was saving the snakes from destruction. They are his creation too. Six months after his initial confrontation with the conservative UAM Christian, Louis was once again painting ancestral snakes.

However, younger UAM adherents have not followed Louis' lead. They remain unconvinced by Louis' dream. It is unwise to become involved in any way with Dreamtime snakes, especially when one's knowledge of such things is limited, as one may unwittingly be celebrating and promoting Satanic powers.

The UAM missionaries, in attempting to come to terms with this fairly unsettling situation, have sought (and found) Biblical precedents for Louis' position. In Acts 10:9-48 the apostle Peter declared that he could eat previously tabooed meat because God had revealed to him - also in a dream - that under the new covenant, there were no

clean/unclean distinctions. New covenant living is defined by one's inner convictions rather than by externally imposed laws.

Local versus universal cosmologies

The majority of Aboriginal Christians in Halls Creek still live within a local cosmology. For the oldest people, there is no ontological separation between heaven and earth. Earth and sky are part of the local environment, and are traversed by the Milky Way track. Sun, moon, lightning and rain are local entities which exist in a social and moral relationship with humans and other life-forms. The sun looks after his own countrymen but can burn strangers. The moon in its full phase can make young girls pregnant.

The oldest people in Halls Creek have adapted Christianity to a local cosmology. God and Jesus can traverse earth and sky by travelling on the Milky Way track. *Mamu*-demons also walk along a track in the air, but God's track is further up, above the clouds where there is no wind. Jesus, when he returns to earth, will come on the Milky Way track. For people who had a Moola Bulla education, however, heaven and earth are no longer connected. The separation of the two dimensions was a consequence of Satan's rebellion against God, and a prelude to colonisation. The earth is the playground of Satan and will be destroyed by fire at the End of the World. Satan will be incarcerated with his followers in hell, and the gulf between the two dimensions will be forever fixed.

For missionaries, people who practise local rituals such as rainmaking or rainstopping rituals are not trusting the Lord in their situation. God

is the Creator and Upholder of the universe, and only he can alter natural laws (thereby producing miracles). A Fitzroy Crossing missionary told of some lawmen at Wangkajunga who were conducting initiation ceremonies. It began to rain. They got a stick and tried to direct the rain around the gathering. In doing this, they were usurping God's sovereignty. The rain fell right on them and they had to seek shelter in a shed. According to the missionary, the lawmen were confused because their magic did not work, and this incident provided an opportunity for the missionary to speak to them of God's universal sovereignty.¹⁸

Some Moola Bulla educated Christians become annoyed when unbelievers (or inadequately educated Christians) try to "hunt the rain away" when travelling: "Christians shouldn't hunt rain away. They should love rain. It comes from God" (JC). When Moses on Mt. Sinai put his arms up like a rainstopper to alter the course of events, he was not usurping God's sovereignty, because "Moses did the action and God did the miracle" (PG). Unlike the incident of the rain-dispersing lawmen, the victory in Israel was attributed to God, not to man.

Summary

This chapter discusses the conflicts which frequently arise in the three churches between Aboriginal people and their missionary leadership. Many of these conflicts can be related to fundamental differences between people's historically-constituted ontologies, politics and moralities. Although Aboriginal people in Halls Creek are town-based,

¹⁸ In agricultural South Africa, it was over rainmaking that Tswana chiefs and evangelical missionaries had some of their most bitter confrontations (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:130).

they have not become polis beings. They still see themselves as land-based and kin-oriented and continue to pursue these goals through land claims. The churches have not been able to solve Aboriginal problems of dispossession and dislocation, although the Catholic church in recent years has become involved in Aboriginal community development.

Chapter 8 is an examination of the changing balance of power between world religions and indigenous religions in Western Christian and post-Christian discourses. This is related to a changing secular consciousness in the peoples of First World countries, that is, an emerging post-industrialist and post-colonialist concern for the earth's resources and indigenous ways of life.

CHAPTER 8

UPSIDE DOWN AND BACK TO FRONT

Although there is a continuity in ideas between hunter-gatherer religions and agricultural/city-state religions, and some of these ideas can be traced back to people's understandings of bodily processes and of the relationship between bodies and the living environment, proponents of city-state religions (and later of world-empire religions) have tended to posit a marked disjunction between their religious and cultural practices and those of peoples living outside the boundaries of agriculture/civilisation.

Hall (1989:2,62) discusses the "discourse of barbarism" which emerged in the Greek tragedies of 5th century Athens at a time when the Greek city-states were embroiled in the Persian wars, and a Panhellenic ideology was emerging.¹ In 18th century Europe, explorers and colonists constructed a discourse of otherness which portrayed the colonised as a people whose humanity was radically discontinuous with their own. William Carey's treatise on the "heathens" who existed outside of European Christendom became a call to missionary endeavour:

What a vast proportion of the sons of Adam there are, who yet remain in the most deplorable state of heathen darkness, without any means of knowing the true God ... They are in

¹ In Mesopotamia, these ideas had long flourished. Babylonian urbanites referred to the Amorite who lived outside the city wall as:

a tent-dweller, [buffered] by wind and rain, [unfamiliar with] the habit of praying... He digs up mushrooms in the hills, but does not know how to kneel; he eats raw meat; he has no house while he lives, nor is he buried when he dies. (van der Toorn 1996:38)

general poor, barbarous, naked pagans, as destitute of civilisation, as they are of true religion. (Carey 1792:62,63)

19th century missionaries to Australia contributed to and extended this discourse of otherness, producing elaborate reconstructions of post-diluvian migration (and a consequent fall from civilisation) in order to account for the presence and the cultural practices of indigenous peoples in colonised countries:

As the whole family of Man was, up to the time of their miraculous dispersion, acquainted with the ordinary arts of civilised life, and endowed with the knowledge of the one living and true God, there must have been on the part of those who are now found destitute of these advantages, an abandonment of what was once their inheritance. The Australian race ... chose not to retain the knowledge of God or the means of individual and social progress; and as a necessary consequence, declined from generation to generation, until even the use of houses and of clothing was forgotten. (Ridley 1864, cited in Bollen 1977:282)

This cataloguing of inferior otherness by European missionaries reached its culmination in Rev.Dr. R.D. Lang's infamous statement:

The Aborigines have no idea of a supreme divinity, the creator and governor of the world ... They have no object of worship ... no idols, no temples, no sacrifices. In short, they have nothing whatever of the character of religion, or of religious observance, to distinguish them from the beasts that perish. (Lang 1861:374)

The early missionaries who took Christianity as a privileged model of "religion", and who interpreted world events according to a unilinear, progressivist view of history (salvation history), read indigenous religions upside down and back to front. They made a dualistic reading of a non-dualistic religion-culture, a universalistic reading of a local

cosmology and consciousness and a kin-based polity and morality, and a hierarchical reading of egalitarian justice, values and spirituality. Indigenous beliefs and practices were read as Satanic, primitive, backward, undeveloped and amoral in comparison with the religion(s) of advanced, civilised societies. Post-Enlightenment discourse, with its secularised version of salvation history, continued these readings which are still available today (see Silverman 1991).

The first generation of UAM missionaries to the Kimberley came with 19th century evangelical missionary views permeated with secular post-Enlightenment values. They interpreted Aboriginal ceremonial life as "Satan worship", and articulated post-diluvian dispersion and degeneration theories to account for the existence of traditional Aboriginal beliefs and practices. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, a new generation of UAM missionaries has begun to look for continuities between Christianity and Aboriginal beliefs and practices. This movement has been influenced (however unconsciously) by changes that have been taking place in Christian and non-Christian intellectual debates since the rise of scientific naturalism and modern rationality. The Bible, once believed to be supernatural history, had by the 19th century in liberal Christian circles come to be seen as a mythological representation of the eternal Spirit or Idea which was continually moving towards completion. Hegel's influence on 19th German Biblical criticism was formative (Pals 1982:175).

Recent German theology has been influenced by the Romantic tradition and 20th century existential philosophy. Post-Enlightenment belief in human goodness and rationality was severely challenged by the European-world wars. Bultmann's and Tillich's theologies began

from the predicament of human existence. Human existence is a fallen state - it is alienation from essential goodness and plenitude, that is, from Being-Itself. The pain of being human is that we are aware of our finite state, that is, our separation from the Infinite, the Unconditional, the Eternal. We are free to choose between authentic and inauthentic existence but, for Bultmann, authentic existence is not possible apart from the Christ-event (Bultmann 1984:27; Newport 1984:67-69; Tillich 1967:25-28).

In existential theology, God is not "the highest Being" who exists above and beyond this world.² For Tillich (1957:16-18), God is the Ground of all our Being. His existence determines and encompasses all other existence. Apprehension of God is not achieved by intellectual argument. Existential consciousness of Ultimate Reality is experienced (however dimly) by all humanity. The act of faith is the act of a finite being who is grasped by and turned towards Infinitude.

Today, some of these ideas are finding their way (often via articles written by university students) into evangelical Christian periodicals, for example, the widely read *On Being*, which can be found in UAM missionary households in Halls Creek. The "Peace Child" model of evangelisation adopted by a younger generation of UAM missionaries is predicated on the belief that God may have been seeking to communicate with Aboriginal people through their traditions before the missionaries arrived with the gospel message. That Satan was also influencing Aboriginal religious traditions is not doubted, but not all Aboriginal practices are seen as evil and to be condemned.

² Even a highest being must ask the question of its own cause, indicating thereby its partial non-being. (Tillich 1953:218)

Missionaries look for "redemptive analogies" in traditional beliefs and practices which can be used to point people to Christ without their having to be totally dislocated from their own culture.

The liberal churches in Arnhem Land make a stronger case for continuity between Aboriginal traditions and Christianity. Aboriginal law has the same purpose as Old Testament law, that is, it was instituted by God to teach people about the nature of the world and of God. It made people aware of their fallen nature and their need for redemption. Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of Aboriginal law as he is of all religious beliefs and practices.

Father Wilson, founder of the Nelen Yubu (Catholic) Missiological Unit believes that Aborigines traditionally had a consciousness of transcendence which they expressed figuratively in "metamorphosing presences" (Wilson 1980:38). Following Maddock (1974:112), he proposes that Aboriginal religions celebrate both local totemic powers and transcendental beings (Wilson n.d.:27).³ Aboriginal rituals are believed to be sacramental in nature - sacramentalism here defined as the enactment of a rite of visible signs by which humans participate in and draw vitality from the salvation event. Wilson utilises Stanner's writings on Aboriginal sacramentalism (see Stanner 1966:28; 1976:20) and believes that Aboriginal ritual can only be properly understood when viewed in relation to Christian, specifically Catholic, sacramentality (Wilson n.d.:53).

³ Other anthropologists describe ancestral beings as "localised" and "travelling" Dreamings (Bell 1983:137; Tonkinson 1991:23). In the Western Desert:

"Travelling ancestors" whose tracks crisscross the desert region are widely known because they have major rituals associated with them. Yet these beings are not accordingly considered more powerful or senior in status than the many localised beings whose exploits are commemorated among a much smaller group of people. (Tonkinson 1991:23)

Although Aboriginal religion is believed to be a response to Divine revelation, it is only a partial response because it has not incorporated the Christ event into its liturgical structures and made salvation history its central theme. Aboriginal religion in its traditional form is an "Old Testament experience" which can be completed by "adding to it the gift of Christ" (Wilson 1980:28). Jesus' life and death can be understood by Aboriginal people when he is presented to them as "the Fulfiller of the Dreamtime" (United Church 1974:11).

At the ordination of the Uniting Church minister, Djiniyini Gondarra in 1976, part of the Djang'kawu song ceremony was performed in recognition of the changed status of indigenous religious practices *vis-a-vis* universalist Christianity. Gondarra, in attempting to develop a post-colonial theology, asserts that:

If this God of the Bible was active in Hebrew history in both the Old and New Testament, then he was also active in Aboriginal history and dreaming. We believe that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is also the God of our forefathers. In Him we have survived and maintained our true Aboriginal spirituality through our religious ceremonies and social life. (Gondarra 1988:2,3)⁴

⁴ These innovations may not be as affirming of indigenous religious traditions as they at first appear to be. At the annual Thanksgiving revival meeting at Elcho Island in 1990, a ceremony was held in which people resurrendered their religious and cultural traditions to "the lordship of Christ". The Memorial of 1957 was remembered as "an act of faith in surrendering the powerful *ranga* of their ancestors to the lordship of Christ" (Habel 1990:2). At the 1990 ceremony people surrendered their fighting sticks to the Cross. Statements were made by Aboriginal leaders which would be perfectly acceptable to UAM missionaries in Halls Creek. Speakers expressed the view that there is both good and bad in Aboriginal culture. For Leon Roughsey:

Satan blinded Aboriginal culture a long time ago. God let Satan do this but continued to be present in Aboriginal culture. (cited in Habel 1990:8)

Jovilisi Ragata, an ordained Uniting Church pastor, stated that:

The impure parts of traditional Aboriginal culture, such as demons, continue to cause sickness and death... The impure parts of any culture need to be cleansed with the power of the blood, the blood of Jesus Christ shed on Calvary. (cited in Habel 1990:8)

Continental theologians and historians of religion such as Otto, Soderblom and Eliade who studied comparative religions, devoted much of their academic life to tracing a continuity between the religions of indigenous peoples and the major world religions. They claim to have studied the religions

from within, that is, from the standpoint of religion itself, which is practised by the religious thinker, who uses categories that have arisen from the nature of religion. (Otto 1932:413, cited in Almond 1984:86).

Using this approach, Otto and Soderblom found that the idea of "the holy" is the religious *a priori*. Religions can exist without fully developed notions of deity or worship, but according to Soderblom, "there is no religion deserving of the name, without a sense of the holy" (1914:181, cited in Sharpe 1990:161). However, "the holy" is a hierarchical concept.⁵ When confronted with the overpowering majesty of the *mysterium tremendum*,⁶ the human response is to shrink in awe and self-abasement, feeling acutely one's creatureliness and sense of nothingness, the absolute unworth of human being (Almond 1984:72).

Parts of the ceremony would have gladdened the hearts of the AOG leadership in Halls Creek:

Individual submissions [to the lordship of Christ] also occurred as people were blessed, healed, prayed over, or 'slain by the Spirit'. (Habel 1990:8).

⁵ I am not arguing here that "the holy" is *intrinsically* hierarchical or indeed, intrinsically anything, since it is a human construct. It does not exist independently of human existence and consciousness - it is a product of the human Imaginary. In the ancient Near East "the holy" was constructed hierarchically, i.e. it was shaped by hierarchising and centralising politico-cosmic structures (see Chapter 2). However, products of the Imaginary must be taken seriously because their effects are real.

⁶ The *mysterium tremendum*: the terrifying mystery and abyssal dissymmetry of the infinite and unapproachable Other which provokes dread, fear and trembling in believers. The *mysterium tremendum* is the gift to humanity of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Derrida 1995:27-33,64).

Otto maintains that indigenous religions have only an "elementary and crude" understanding of the *numinous* or "the holy". What "primitive" religionists experience is demonic fear, shamanic obsession, totemism, witchcraft and fetishism (Otto 1931:96). Indian religious traditions also have a deficient concept of "the holy" because they fail to recognise the ethical dimension of the divine (Otto 1932:225). Christianity, however, with its well developed concepts of holiness, sin and salvation, has a highly developed understanding of "the holy" (Almond 1984:58,114,123).

It may be seen here quite clearly that Otto and Soderblom (like present day missionaries), in attempting to trace a continuity between indigenous religions and world religions have been working back to front.⁷ Instead of beginning with the concepts of indigenous religions and tracing these ideas (with their elaborations and changes) through to world religions, they have begun with world religions.⁸ World

⁷ Williams (1986:136) discusses this problem in relation to hunter-gatherer and agricultural/colonial politico-economic structures. She writes of

... a tendency to assume that the European present is a yardstick against which characteristics of other societies can be discovered. The result is generally to find that they have *not* what we *have*... Reasoning backward in time to reconstruct a state of nature by means of a have/have not contrast... [allows theorists] to conclude that hunters and gatherers have no concept of property.

Likewise, in *Storytracking Texts: Stories and Histories in Central Australia* (1997), Gill shows that Eliade's interpretation of the Australian myth, "Numbakulla and the Sacred Pole", is "entirely a European construct, motivated largely by his pre-conceptions about the nature of religion". Eliade, like many others, has not been able to keep his own religious background out of his descriptions of other people's religions. He interprets religions from a world religions perspective, using the concepts (and prejudices) of world religions.

⁸ I am not here discussing an orderly progression of ideas from simple to complex, such as Durkheim (1915) would prescribe. On the contrary, following Dean (1994:4), I would advocate alertness to "the dispersion of historical transformation, the rapid mutation of events, the multiplicity of temporalities, the differential forms of the timing and spacing of activities, and the possibility of invasion and even reversal of historical pathways."

religions, especially Christianity, are believed to be highly developed human responses to the divine imperative.

A hierarchical spirituality, that is, a spirituality which emphasizes the majesty and awefulness of the divine, in whose presence the human feels devalued and even annihilated, is believed to be a highly developed spirituality. The only proper human response to such displays of *tremenda majestas*⁹ is one of submission and obedience. For Soderblom,

True religion begins only when a person is forced in spirit, if not outwardly, to kneel by a sense of powerlessness and a sense of being a debtor and a recipient, without the possibility of paying the debt. (Soderblom 1910:382, cited in Sharpe 1990:155).

The hierarchical concepts of world religions (for example, the idea of "the holy") are traced back (unsuccessfully) to indigenous religions, resulting in distortion and devaluation of the indigenous religions. Forcing hierarchical (and often universalised) concepts into local/egalitarian cosmologies produces readings of indigenous religions such as the following:

Belief in and worship of the dead, belief in and worship of 'souls' or 'spirits', magic, fairytale, and myth, homage to natural objects, whether frightful or extraordinary... worship of animal and plant, daemonism and polydaemonism. (Otto 1950:117).

Soderblom and Otto, in their attempts to define "true religion", also entered the magic/religion debate popularised by Frazer (1960).¹⁰

⁹ *Tremenda majestas*: the powerful and majestic divinity, the terrifying power of the supreme and absolute ruler which makes man tremble before him (Mensching 1964:36).

¹⁰ Frazer's assessment of Aborigines' intellectual and spiritual "development" was:

People who live within a local cosmology and in a moral relationship (for example, a relationship of balanced reciprocity) with other life-forms are portrayed as practitioners of magic. Their interactions with other life-forms (whether of the earth or sky) are believed to be coercive and manipulative. They fail to adequately acknowledge higher (read hierarchical) spiritual powers. People who live within a hierarchical and universalised cosmology are classed as practitioners of religion. Their relationship to the divine is characterised by humility, reverence, supplication and propitiation:

In the former case [religion] it is man who submits to the deity and obeys it. In the latter [magic] man makes himself lord of the powers and employs them for his own purposes. (Soderblom 1939:18).¹¹

However, people who live within a local cosmology are not arrogating universal powers to themselves and using these powers without proper expressions of awe and wonder, gratitude and submission. The powers they use are local, ancestral powers. Their interaction is with the intimate known, not the infinite unknown, the nameless mystery, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.¹² Their relationship with other life-forms in their world is a relationship of kinship.¹³

Among the aborigines of Australia, the rudest savages as to whom we possess accurate information, magic is universally practised, whereas religion, in the sense of a propitiation of the higher powers, seems to be unknown. (Frazer 1960:72)

¹¹ These views are still held today. Hexham and Poewe make a distinction between what they refer to as "theistic faith" and "nontheistic magic". For them, Faith in magic is a psychological impossibility. At most belief in magic may pacify suspicion, jealousy, and insecurity. But it cannot produce faith, because by definition faith excludes belief in magic... The essence of Christianity is trust. The essence of traditional and non-Western systems of magic and divination is a mixture of mistrust, jealousy, and suspicion - precisely the opposite of trust. (Hexham and Poewe 1997:155)

¹² The fascinating/repellent mystery of the infinite divine Other.

¹³ For all Stanner's efforts to rescue Aboriginal religions from the miry category of magic Frazer had consigned them to, his own understandings of "religion" led him (however unwittingly) to devalue Aboriginal practices. For Stanner (1984:146), "the

Despite their efforts to extend their religious gaze beyond the narrow parochial view of European Christendom, and to include all humanity within the category of *homo religiosus*, Soderblom's and Otto's conclusions have little religious or anthropological value. Because they have been unable to disengage themselves from a unilinear and progressivist view of history, their studies of indigenous religions have remained locked within a discourse of primitivism.

A new generation of continental theologians has begun to look critically at the discourses of Western Christendom. Influenced by the post-war political climate of democratic liberalism in Europe, they have come to see a hierarchical spirituality as arrogant and triumphalist, creating distance between God and the world, and diminishing the worth of human beings. Such theologians begin with the premise that theology is an imaginative human construction. The old models of God (King/Creator/Father) which emphasize the transcendent attributes of omniscience, omnipotence and absolute authority have become outmoded and are an affront to contemporary human sensibility (Kaufman 1993:32,302-304; McFague 1987:19).

These authors propose new models of God that cohere with contemporary understandings of the world, that is, with contemporary politico-cosmic structures. Human beings today do not live within a

Aborigines had taken... the longest and most difficult step towards the formation of a truly religious outlook." It would appear that for Stanner "a truly religious outlook" is none other than that promulgated by world religions. Indeed, although "a strong, explicit religious ethic was absent" in Aboriginal religions, and spirit beings exerted "only a vaguely moral-ethical potency" (one would need to ask whose morality we are discussing here), "a *foundation* existed for a systematic belief in gods and for institutions of priesthood, prayer and sacrifice"(p 146,150,151, italics added).

static, hierarchical cosmos of Ptolemaic or Newtonian proportions, but in an expanding and evolving universe. There is no outside or beyond from which a divine creative being could direct the affairs of the universe (Kaufman 1993:46; McFague 1987:79).

The new models of God and the world are nonhierarchical and nondualistic. "God" is the symbol for a monotheistic and universal divinity which does not transcend the world (or universe) but expresses itself immanently (and can only be apprehended immanently) in the world. For some theologians who are travelling close to contemporary physics, this power has been depersonalised and degendered. For Kaufman, the symbol "God" refers to

that cosmic serendipitous creativity which manifests itself in the evolutionary-historical trajectory that has brought humanity into being and continues to sustain it in being. (Kaufman 1993: 375)

Feminist theologians, however, who place primary emphasis on God's relationship to the world, do not wish to discard personal metaphors. McFague and others have discarded the King/Creator/Father models of God which they see as anachronistic in a post-imperialistic world, and have replaced them with a new trinity: mother/lover/friend. These metaphors draw God out of the lofty heights of heaven back to earth and allow McFague to attribute to the God-world relationship the qualities of interdependence and mutual responsibility. McFague also moves from an anthropocentric to an ecological vision of the world. The world in relationship to God includes not only human beings and spiritual intermediaries but the whole of creation.

McFague proposes that the world (or universe) be imaginatively conceptualised as the body of God. This body is not ontologically separate from God, but proceeds forth from God by procreation. God as mother generates and bodies forth all life from her being. Creation *ex nihilo* is not a Biblical concept (McFague 1993:18-22, 151-157). Using the model of the universe as God's body, McFague hopes to overcome the transcendence/immanence dichotomy which has had a troubled history in Judaism and Christianity. In the past, these traditions extolled a radically transcendent God (that is, a distant, external and all-powerful Being, who was above and independent of the universe) in contrast to the denigrated immanentist philosophies of "pagan" religions (McFague 1993:219).

In this [new] body model, God would not be transcendent over the universe in the sense of external to or apart from, but would be the source, power, and goal - the spirit - that enlivens (and loves) the entire process and its material forms. (McFague 1993:20)

Belief in an ontological separation between earth and sky-heaven (and between body and spirit) that was elaborated as early as 3300 BC in Mesopotamia, is being battered in the late 20th century by feminist and ecological theologians.¹⁴ God is not separate from the world. Nor is he all-powerful and invulnerable to human-terrestrial disorder and chaos. When the world suffers, God suffers too. For Schillebeeckx, God is not without power *per se*, but in relationship to his creation, he has made himself vulnerable. Schillebeeckx is engaged in dehierarchising

¹⁴ However, conservative Christians who equate spirituality with hierarchy, object to any attempts to dehierarchise the politico-cosmic order. For Hexham and Poewe, the Christian understanding that there is a significant distinction between God and creation" is superior to "belief in an acosmic monism, the oneness of all things... Acosmic monism implies immanent magic. The Christian distinction between God and his creation implies the need for transcendent faith. (Hexham and Poewe 1997:155)

the covenant relationship between God and his people. True partnership presupposes freedom and initiative from both sides:

By giving creative space to human beings, God makes himself vulnerable ... By creating human beings with their own finite and free will, God voluntarily renounces power. That makes God to a high degree 'dependent' on human beings. (Schillebeeckx 1990:90)

However, although Kaufman, McFague and Schillebeeckx have been constructing models of God that are nonhierarchical and nondualistic, they are not prepared to renounce monotheism in favour of an impious Lyotardian pluralism of gods and values (see Caputo 1993:33). For Kaufman, only a radical monotheism is able to provide a unified interpretive framework which enables humans to create cohesive structures of meaning from diversity and disorder. It provides a focus for devotion and service, creating free and responsible human beings, and drawing humans out of their parochialisms into a universal consciousness (Kaufman 1993:71-73,313). Polytheistic systems on the other hand create deterministic and fatalistic attitudes in people, inhibiting the development of genuine moral agency and responsibility (p 74).

These theologians are also unwilling to extricate themselves from a unilinear and teleological view of history, from eschatological Enlightenment narratives of progress, reconciliation or emancipation. Their salvation history will culminate in the earthly establishment of the Kingdom of God, a radically egalitarian (both post-colonial and post-industrial) community committed to peace, love and justice (Kaufman 1993:389; McFague 1987:51).

Late 20th century continental theologians, influenced by Western liberal democratic polities and contemporary science, are turning Western Christianity upside down and back to front. Western Christianity is being dehierarchised and dehellenised (see Caputo, Cupitt, Kaufman, Kung, Schillebeeckx) and feminised (see Grey, McFague, Plaskow). God is being un-kinged. His attributes of absolute power and transcendence are being jettisoned in favour of his (or her) relatedness to the whole of creation (human and nonhuman), including the experience of vulnerability and woundedness.

Ecological theologians such as Berry, Collins, Fox and Lilburne claim affinity with indigenous religions. Christianity, stripped of hellenistic other-worldliness, and drawing inspiration from earlier Hebrew and pre-Hebrew sources, can once again become earth-loving. Theologians are rediscovering the land-based spirituality of the early Hebrew traditions (see Lilburne 1989:45-48).¹⁵ Matthew Fox's "creation spirituality" celebrates God's intimate connection with the earth. He finds inspiration in sources as diverse as medieval European mysticism, Hebrew Wisdom literature and Native American religions. Drawing from both locative and utopian religious traditions (to use Jonathan Smith's terminology), Fox creates a hybrid spirituality in which the Cosmic Christ (of Apocalyptic literature) becomes incarnate in the spatio-temporal sphere as the crucified and bleeding Mother Earth (Fox 1988:41-43, 145-149).

Jesus Christ as Mother Earth who freely bestows on all life-forms the blessings of abundant life, has been deeply wounded by the greed and

¹⁵ Lilburne produced a module for Nungalinga College's Associate Diploma of Theology titled *Theology of Land* (1995).

rapaciousness of modern humanity. Today, oppressed and suffering and without a voice, she is being crucified for the sins of the world. Yet she will rise again (Fox 1988:145-149).

In seeking to discover the sources of human denigration and destruction of the earth, ecological theologians generally focus on the post-Enlightenment project - a project of rationality, progress and increasing mechanisation of the world's life energies. Some trace this trajectory back to the Hebrew Bible, to the Genesis account of creation with its admonition to humans to dominate and subdue the earth. It could also be traced back to a pre-Israelite era of city-state development when the agricultural sky gods arrogated all fecunding powers to themselves, reducing the earth to the status of a passive receptacle.

Ecological theologians, following the work of contemporary scientists such as Fritjof Capra, Paul Davies, Stephen Hawking, Lovelock and Sheldrake, are mounting a critique of the mechanistic model of the universe which has dominated scientific and related discourses since the 17th century. Such a model which sees nature as "a system of dead, inert particles moved by external forces" (Merchant 1980:193) has justified human domination and conquest of nature for more than three centuries.

McFague (1987:8) suggests that feminist and ecological theologians return to an organic model of the universe. This move is already occurring in (some) contemporary sciences. An holistic or organismic philosophy of nature has been developing in scientific circles since the 1920s. Organisms are self-organising processes of activity, and the cosmos is like a growing organism, forming new structures within

itself as it develops. In an expanding and evolving universe which responds creatively to change, ideas of substance, immutability and perfection are no longer appropriate categories for understanding the world. More relevant to contemporary physics and biology are the ideas of indeterminism, spontaneity and chaos (Sheldrake 1990:xiv, 80-126).

In an organic model of the world everything is interconnected and relationships are characterised by interdependence and mutual responsibility (McFague 1987:165-167). Theologians such as Collins, Fox and Stockton, in their attempts to reclaim an organic world view for a new imagining of Christianity, have turned to indigenous religions for guidance. Matthew Fox claims that the organic notion of "original blessing" (as descriptive of the God-world relationship) which dominates the earliest Hebrew literature, and which he contrasts with "original sin", is shared by all indigenous religions. A spiritual relationship with the living environment, which emphasizes the interrelatedness of all life, is well developed in indigenous religions. Indigenous people's consciousness of their relatedness to the land, re-membered in ritual, "can be a great gift to the Christian churches" (Fox 1988:248). Denis Edwards talks of the Australian church being "in apprenticeship to the Aboriginal view of the land". *Dadirri*, an Aboriginal (*Ngangikurungkurr*) practice of "listening to" the land is a spiritual gift that is today being made available to non-Aboriginal Australians (Edwards 1987:11-13, cited in Stockton 1995:113).

But, however much Christian theologians claim to be "in apprenticeship" to Aboriginal spiritual practices, what they are seeking

is a world religious experience, not an indigenous religious experience:

We have a desperate need to rediscover through a more sacramental and iconographic approach to reality, the sense of the presence of the transcendent in the natural world itself... As long as wilderness lasts, we will still have the potential to enter into what the historian of religion, Rudolf Otto, has called the experience of the "holy" or the "numinous". We are able to experience both the numinous and the sheer sanctity of specific parts of a given landscape and to apprehend, by analogy, a transcendent presence that stands both within and yet paradoxically beyond the mysterious place. (Collins 1995:212)

Many Australians hunger for a deeper relationship to the land in which they live. The fact that there are moments when the experience of this land opens out towards transcendence provides the basis for hope that we can learn to relate to the land in a creative way... in and through the symbol of the land we can be open to the liberating activity of the Spirit of God. (Edwards 1987:13, cited in Stockton 1995:114)

Despite their dislike of hierarchical and dualistic theological constructions, ecological theologians still appear to be bewitched by the "spell of infinity" (Caputo 1993:63). They are unwilling to give up an imaginary realm of universal and eternal values. Their reappropriation of land and bodies as sites of spiritual significance is therefore highly ambiguous. Koyre (1957) discusses the ascendancy of the idea of the infinite in late medieval, Renaissance and early modern thinking. Preoccupation with infinite space in hellenistic and medieval periods was accompanied by a forgetting of the (constitutive) relationship of bodies to place. "The increasing fascination during the

Renaissance with the idea of an infinite universe... spelled an increasingly bodiless and placeless tale" (Casey 1993:46).¹⁶

Radical spiritual feminists (who on the whole are post-Christian and post-Jewish feminists) claim that their spirituality is strongly immanentist, in contrast with male qualities of transcendence, separation and distance. "Women's embodied finitude" is celebrated in feminist religions because it is seen as continuous with, not ontologically separate from, divine creative power. Divine creativity expresses itself in the world through female embodiment and the transformative energy of female activities (Raphael 1996:23). Radical feminists, unlike reformist feminists such as McFague, here eliminate the necessity for a Christology. The divine does not need the body of Christ in order to achieve immanence in the world.

¹⁶ Max Charlesworth, a prominent Australian Catholic philosopher who in recent years has developed a scholarly interest in Aboriginal religions and philosophies (see Charlesworth 1984, 1990, 1997, 1998), claims to have a special understanding of Aboriginal religions because of his own religious background. However, he, like early 20th century continental theologians and historians of religion, and late 20th century feminist and ecological theologians, seems unable finally to disengage himself from a world religions perspective on religions, and to see indigenous religions in their own terms. He sees spiritual power as something which is intrinsically and necessarily universal, whether or not its existence is beyond or within-beyond the material universe. For Charlesworth (1997:5-33), religions are, by definition, finite and fallible human responses to divine revelation which is always universal and salvific in character. Divine revelation is ultimately (in all religions) about human salvation. All authentic religions (including authentic Aboriginal religions) are salvation religions.

What has been neglected in the past, and needs to be emphasized in future studies of Australian Aboriginal religions, therefore, are:

issues of a philosophical-theological kind: for example, the conditions of possibility of the realm of 'the divine', the foundation of the ethical order, the existence of evil (both physical and moral), moral conflict and tragedy, personal autonomy in religion and enlightenment or 'salvation', freedom and fatalism, space and time and history in religious cosmology, the concept of truth in religion. Stanner once remarked that for the Australian Aborigines 'life is a joyous thing with maggots at the centre', and it is understanding the meaning of philosophical-theological intuitions like this that requires an approach that goes beyond social anthropology. (Charlesworth 1997:79)

The re-emergence of the Goddess in the West is understood, in quasi-eschatological terms, as a divine return. In this Second Coming, it is not the Son of God but the Goddess herself who is returning, and her return will end the "Dark Age of Monotheism". With the Goddess' return comes a "re-enchantment" of nature and of science. Humans do not need salvation from the organic (including the human) world of indeterminism, contingency and chaos. Birth, efflorescence, death and regeneration are part of life, to be lived and celebrated, not transcended (Raphael 1996:227-228).

In its task of constructing a green, post-patriarchal and postmodern spirituality (Raphael 1996:52), spiritual feminism draws its inspiration (and its metaphors) from pre city-state agricultural religions. The earth is imaged as a womb-like mother who recycles all matter and regenerates new life from old.

Hyan Kyung Chung, a Korean feminist theologian who presented her theological views at the 1991 World Council of Churches Assembly in Canberra, speaks of an emerging Asian women's spirituality which is being used to critique traditional (particularly male) understandings of Christianity in the First World. "Women-centred cosmic religions" which revolve around the rhythm of the cosmos, are contrasted with the largely male-dominated meta-cosmic religions, that is, the "so-called higher world religions" which "always try to go beyond this material world in order to find the purer forms of spiritual reality" (Chung 1990:112).

Traditional Christian spirituality, as well as being held captive for centuries by "patriarchy, colonialism and Western cultural

imperialism", is seen as individualistic in orientation and removed from the world in which people live. It focusses on human interiority and a "life of perfection to attain salvation". Asian women's spirituality, in contrast, claims to be "integral, outgoing, community-oriented, active, holistic and all embracing" (Chung 1990:86).

For Chung (1990:114), Asian women's spirituality and theology must "move away from Christo-centrism and toward life-centrism". Asian women are turning for inspiration to the "wisdom of their foremothers", in particular to pre city-state agricultural spiritualities in which "the image of the Mother as the Divine Womb - a source of life and nurture - protects and seeks only that which engenders and sustains the life of all its parts" (Chung 1990:96).

In the late 20th century the agricultural Mother Earth metaphor is being reclaimed by apparently disparate groups of people as a focus for developing a contemporary spirituality. This organic image emphasizes the dependence of humans on the earth and its resources, and the urgent need for humans to develop reciprocal practices of care and respect. Human life-forms who have become conscious of their relationship to the earth and to the wider cosmos, need to develop a spirituality that values not transcendence, independence and self-sufficiency (values derived from hierarchical political structures), but the organic values of interdependence and mutuality.

In the East Kimberley today, there are a growing number of Aboriginal people, many of whom work for Aboriginal organisations such as the Kimberley Land Council, Kimberley Language Resource Centre, Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre and various art and craft

associations, who identify explicitly as post-Christian. The majority of these people are in their 30s and 40s, younger people being too shy or embarrassed to become involved in Aboriginal politics, especially at regional and national levels. Some have had long apprenticeships (developing leadership and organisational skills) in the UAM and Catholic mission churches of the 1960s and 70s. In attempting to construct a spirituality that is relevant to present day concerns of land equity and social justice, these people are appropriating the agricultural Mother-Earth metaphor minus the hierarchical and earth-denigrating Father-Sky.

In regional gatherings of the Kimberley Land Council, Kimberley Language Resource Centre and Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, Aboriginal leaders deal not only with the practical issues of organisation and funding, but attempt to formulate general philosophies to support their various projects. In these discussions, Mother-Earth functions as a unifying icon, and a focus for people's emphasis on land tenure as a primary Aboriginal requirement. These Aboriginal leaders do not have the detailed local, particularistic knowledge of their elders, and are content to claim a spirituality that is both land-based and kinship-oriented.¹⁷

A Mother-Earth philosophy, unlike local and regional cults, can be easily universalised.¹⁸ Christianity is obviously also a unifying and universalising religion, but because it is closely associated with colonisation by people who received some education in the south of

¹⁷ When their elders hear young to middle-aged people making these assertions, they complain about them saying, "Our old people never talked about mother earth".

¹⁸ But see Kolig (1981:37-43) on a universalising project in the Fitzroy Valley region of the Kimberley, using local and regional ancestral beings.

the state,¹⁹ and because it is not land-based (at least in its conservative evangelical form which is the dominant form in East Kimberley Protestant Christianity), its ability to help Aboriginal people achieve their goals today is severely limited.²⁰

In Christianised Arnhem Land, unlike East Kimberley where a Mother Earth philosophy is believed (at least by the old people) to be distinct from both traditional religious practice and Christianity, a Mother Earth philosophy is being assimilated to Christianity²¹:

Listen! listen! all the nations of this planet. The mother earth is crying out in great pain. Just listen to her very words. Just close your eyes and feel the touch of her spirituality in agony... In the beginning when God created the universe, the mother earth was formless - desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the power of God was moving over the waters (which is the Spirit of God, the Ruach, the mighty wind)... The earth is a backbone and a mother to me. The mother earth brings new life to every living thing, both great and small... Let the streams of life give water to our mother earth, and make the desert turn into a fertile land flowing with milk and honey. Most gracious father, flow your healing streams of life upon the mother earth so that through your help she may create a new life once more. (Gondarra 1991:1,4)

As already discussed, the churches in the Kimberley have not been able to solve Aboriginal problems of dispossession and dislocation. Christianity, developing in the hellenised Mediterranean world (and still a hellenistic religion in conservative evangelical Christian circles), is itself a religion of displaced peoples. While feminist and

¹⁹ See Chi and Kuckles (1991), *Bran nue dae: a musical journey*.

²⁰ The liberal churches in Arnhem Land (Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Church) which are rediscovering the land-based spirituality of the early Hebrew traditions, have become involved in helping Aboriginal people achieve land equity in Australia.

²¹ More correctly, Yolngu concepts such as MM(B) country as "backbone" are being assimilated to Mother Earth, and both are being articulated with Christianity.

ecological theologians are trying to return Christianity to its Hebrew (rather than its Greek) roots, it will never be a religion of place in the sense of being part of a finite universe in which places (and bodies) have their own creative potency. The lure of infinite space will always compete in Western religious consciousness with the claims of Mother Earth.

However, despite a hundred years' colonisation in northern Australia, in which Aboriginal people have been subjected to repeated waves of dispossession and dislocation, East Kimberley people continue to see themselves as land-based and kin-oriented. Despite UAM and AOG missionaries preaching of a universalist two-worlds cosmology and a unilinear salvation history (and AOG insistence that humans must be saved *from* this world),

Aborigines on the whole still see themselves as landowners... They feel that they have not relinquished their title to the land... All these things [that is, biological life, traditional law, customs and beliefs] are in the ground... the ground from where everything comes and to which everything eventually returns. (Kolig 1987:126,127)

God is in his heaven, and Christians will one day be with God. But unlike Swain's scenario for the southern states of Australia (see Swain 1993:118-132), Aboriginal people in the north have not denigrated the earth and transferred all goodness and redemption to a distant sky-world. Many Aboriginal people in East Kimberley, both Christians and non-Christians, accept the Christian story (or parts of it) as an explanation for the way things are today. As a world history that can encompass all human conditions, it is able to account for events in the world that Dreaming stories cannot make sense of. As a story of

Satan's rebellion against God, with the consequent corruption of the earth and humanity, it provides a beautifully simple and coherent explanation of colonisation, dispossession and displacement.

However, unlike the displaced aristocracy of the Greek city-states who were captivated by a new hierarchical cosmology, Aboriginal people in East Kimberley have not exchanged their local, kin-based polity and cosmology for a city-state one. For the majority of Aboriginal people in Halls Creek, the lived-in universe is still largely consubstantial. While there is a growing ontological separation between heaven and earth, and between creator and created, the earthly realm has maintained its "traditional" integrity. Aboriginal people in East Kimberley still see themselves as local-regional rather than universal beings,²² and continue to pursue their earthly goals through land claims.

The religion that the missionaries preached to Aboriginal people was a religion of placelessness which developed its utopian qualities in diaspora and exile. As a consequence, Aboriginal Christianity in East Kimberley is an embodied but not an implaced experience. Evangelical

²² Although it is in the interests of an Aboriginal leader (and sometimes in the interests of the group as a whole) to expand his sphere of influence, i.e. to make alliances with neighbouring and more distant groups, to perform successfully in activities (political and religious) that generate prestige, and to have his name known over wide areas, in East Kimberley the loyalties, prejudices and emotions of ordinary people are intensely local.

Williams makes a similar observation for northeastern Arnhem Land:

Ambitious and able Yolngu leaders in the past apparently extended their spheres of influence [throughout] a large area of northeastern Arnhem Land... their authority [was legitimated] in a kind of regional political alliance... [However, although individuals were] provided with the potential, if they were ambitious and politically capable, for extending their range [of influence], people's strongest ties of sentiment and loyalty were to close kin and their lands, a set of identifications and relationships of the highest importance throughout their lives. (Williams 1987:44,150)

missionaries' insistence that the earth is only a temporary place - that our real home is in heaven - has left Aboriginal people free to construct their own relationship to the earth, unmediated by Christianity. Aboriginal sense of implacement in East Kimberley is still traditional. On bush trips with UAM and AOG adherents, one hears not only stories of station life and contemporary life, but stories of the Dreamtime. Jesus' blood does not flow through the country but Dreaming beings have not forsaken the land. Rather than accepting a religion of exile as compensation for dispossession and displacement, Aboriginal people in northern Australia are choosing to repossess their land.

GLOSSARY

<i>binyjawinyja</i>	quartz crystal.
<i>birlirr</i>	visceral life-force associated with the breath and bodily pulsation.
<i>daragu</i>	secret-sacred, powerful, dangerous (objects, places, songs, designs, dances, words)
<i>gardiya</i>	white person.
<i>giningi</i>	respiratory/cardiovascular organs associated emotions and volition.
<i>jagiliny</i>	moon.
<i>jaja</i>	mother's mother; daughter's daughter.
<i>jarriny</i>	reincarnation; the process by which <i>mamu/juwarri</i> re-enter a woman's body to be born again.
<i>jiluwa</i>	network of blood vessels.
<i>juwarri</i>	motile life-force/spirit of the dead [Gija]. It can appear externally to its body as a shadow or reflection during a person's life, and as a walking ghost or shade after his or her death.
<i>kukurr</i>	spirit of the dead [Walmajarri].
<i>liyan</i>	intuition, premonition [Gija].
<i>mabarn man</i>	traditional healer, medicine man, clever man [Jarú].
<i>m a m u</i>	motile life-force/spirit of the dead [Jarú]. Recategorised by Christian missionaries as evil spirit or demon of Christianity.
<i>munda</i>	diaphragm/stomach area [Jarú].
<i>nalija</i>	tea.
<i>ngarangkani</i>	Dreaming.

ngarbu father.

walurr sun.

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